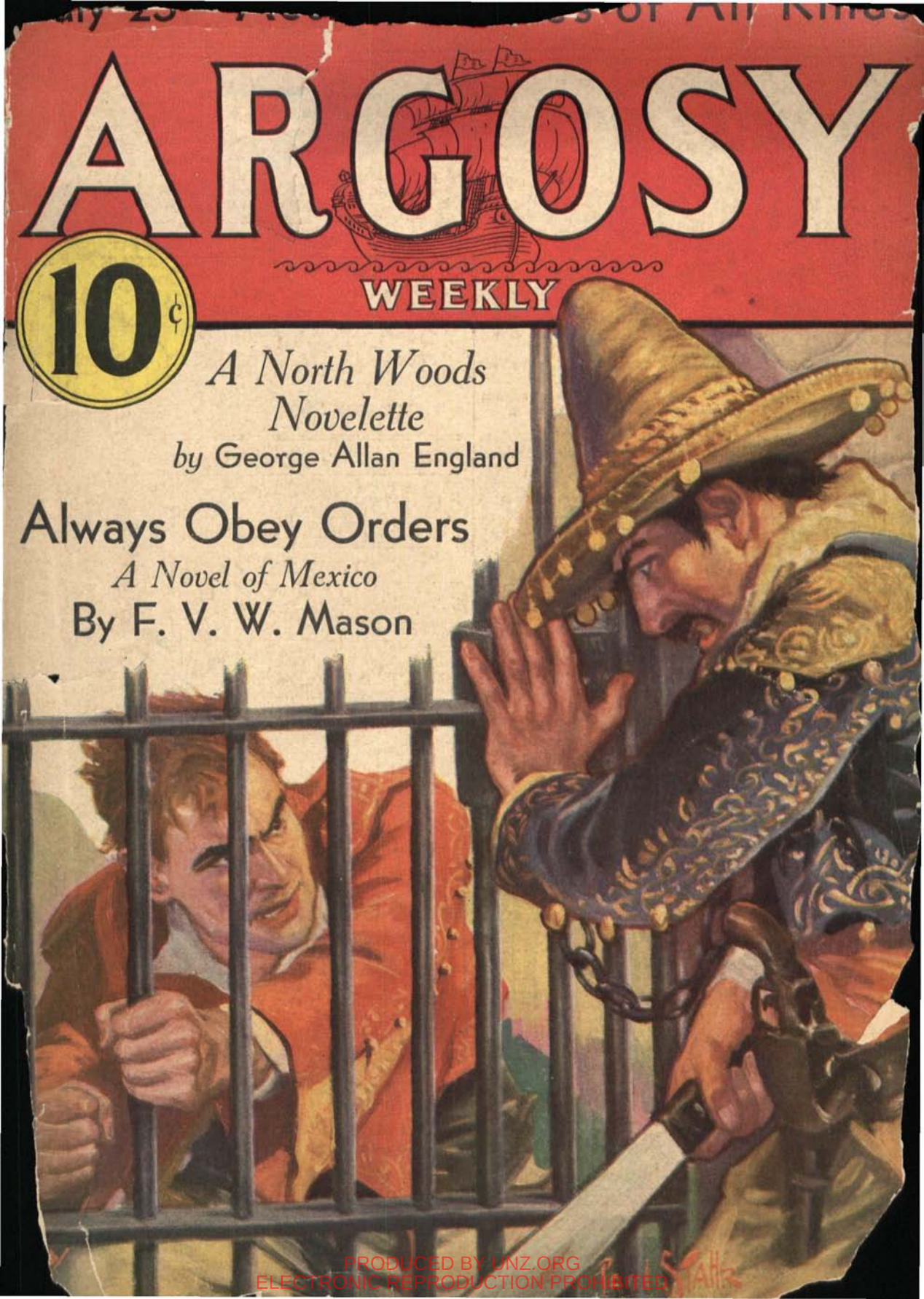
ARGOSY

WEEKLY

10¢

A North Woods Novelette
by George Allan England

Always Obey Orders
A Novel of Mexico
By F. V. W. Mason



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Action Stories of Every Variety

VOLUME 231 | CONTENTS FOR JULY 23, 1932 | NUMBER 3

COMPLETE STORIES

Titans of the North (Novelette—Complete) . . George Allan England 24
Lumber conflict in the far North.

Good-by Pennant (Short Story) . . . . . John A. Thompson 58
A baseball sacrifice has strange results

Men of Daring (True Story in Pictures) . . . . . Stookie Allen 92
Captain Eob Bartlett, master of men

Sand—à la Carte (Short Story) . . . . . Jack Allman 94
A hungry man's bold venture

Lion Tamer (Short Story) . . . . . John H. Thompson 120
Testing a braggart's bravery

SERIALS

Always Obey Orders (Three Parts. Part I) . . . . F. V. W. Mason 2
Strife in Mexico under Maximilian I

The Unknown Island (Six Parts. Part II) . . . . . Fred MacIsaac 70
Stranded in a South Seas paradise

The Radio War (Five Parts. Part IV) . . . . . Ralph Milne Farley 98
Science comes to America's defense in the year 2000

Breath of the Desert (Six Parts. Conclusion) . . Charles Alden Seltzer 124
Cowmen's law in Arizona

OTHER FEATURES

COVER DESIGN . . . . . Paul Stahr
Hot Ice . . . . . John H. Spicer 23
The American Menu . . . . . C. W. Levere 91
The Mississippi Delta . . . . . J. E. Greer 97
Why Bedouins Never Harm Foxes . . . . . Armand Brigaud 123
A South Seas Solomon . . . . . William P. Schramm 141
Argonotes 143
Looking Ahead! 144

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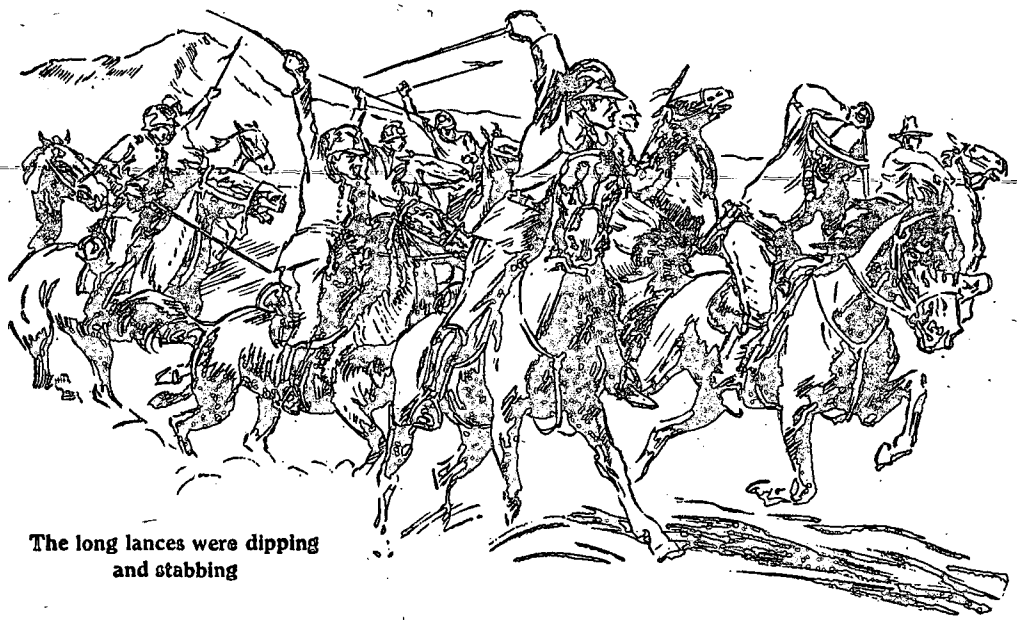

The long lances were dipping and stabbing

Always Obey Orders

By F. V. W. MASON

Author of "Captain Judas," "Captain Renegade," etc.

Because the family motto had always been "Obey orders," Major Mike Lockheed was defending the ford against his own brother, who had been sent back to Mexico by Napoleon III

CHAPTER I.

RETREAT.

"NO two ways about it, Spurr, we've got to get that ammunition back," panted Major Mike Lockheed, turning a red and dusty face over his tarnished silver epaulette. Then he peered ahead again, his long, red-uniformed body swaying easily to his charger's powerful gallop.

"Yep." A bronze-featured rider who, in a faded brown uniform, was riding a horse's length behind, nodded vigorously. "We shore got to get it back, or them Frenchies will just nach-

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erally massacree us if we try to hold them fords."

Major Mike Lockheed, the foremost horseman, looked very young and lithe in his dusty and spotted red uniform; but his strong features were set, and he kept his singularly clear blue eyes shakes now, and they'll outnumber us quite a heap."

"Zapatos and Ribera are better off out of the way, Lieutenant Spurr." And at the mention of the names, the young commander's features darkened momentarily. Then he called out over the clatter of hoofs: "Think they'll stand?"

Beneath the visor of a tall felt shako set on the head of Lieutenant Spurr, ex-sergeant of the Second United States Dragoons, narrow black eyes studied the billowing dust ahead.

thoughtfully fixed on a lazy pillar of dust that arose from the hot, sunlit plain perhaps a half mile ahead. When he peered back over his broad left shoulder again, he found that he could see the first view of his sixty-odd Jalisco lancers very clearly. Further back, the whirling dust only permitted glimpses of tossing manes, flaring red nostrils, the shimmer of helmets and the quick flick and snap of the yellow and red pennons on the tips of long yellow-shafted lances.

"Wish to hell we hadn't split forces, sir," growled the leathery faced rider galloping at Mike's elbow. "We'll be onto these here *mal hombres* in two

"Reckon so, sir; with them pack loads of ammunition, them guerrillas can't keep up this speed much longer. But they's got nigh a hundred men and us less'n sixty. What'll you do if they try to stand us off?"

"We'll charge 'em like hell!" briefly returned the red-uniformed leader as he slowed his powerful golden bay to a gallop more nearly the average speed of the small, wiry mustangs ridden by the little red-and-yellow-clad lancers.

Pursuers and pursued were now pounding along over a broad mesa

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where grass, burnt yellow-brown by the hot son of Oaxaca, made a smooth, endless carpet. But the heavy golden brown dust was just as thick here as anywhere else. Straight toward a line of jagged blue mountains the marauders were retiring, followed by a comet-like trail of dust.

As the interval narrowed, Mike suddenly found himself wondering why el Hiena, that brutal scourge of Republicans and Imperialists alike, had sent such a small force to pounce upon the pack train of ammunition so vital for a defense of the fords of the San Gorgio.

The dust in the air grew steadily thicker, and soon the sweating pursuers thundered past an abandoned pack horse which limped feebly along, lathered from crest to fetlock; then a second and a third.

"They'll stop soon," Spurr cried.

Slowly, Mike Lockheed reined in his horse and motioned back the foremost of his followers. Better to close up his ranks before charging upon these savage marauders. He glanced back again, saw his men riding in to form a loose triple rank, their lance points twinkling in the sun and their helmet-shaded faces eager and tensed.

Good soldiers. Yes, old Colonel Lockheed, his father, had been right. Mexicans, when properly led, made as good cavalry as any in the world. In fact they were quite a likeable people when a fellow got to know them the way he and Andy had, since their father's return to Mexico after that unhappy war between the two republics.

GRIM pleasure filled him as he beheld the fugitive guerrillas flogging the pack horses in a last and vain effort to urge more speed out of them. One of the bandits, a huge fellow in a towering sombrero and a brilliant green sash, suddenly drew rein and began waving his arms, signalling certain of his followers to the rear, while the pack horses kept up their lumbering flight.

As he perceived the bandits' preparation for battle, Mike's breath began to come shorter. With a grim smile, he loosened and drew from its scabbard the heavy American saber that was securely tucked beneath his left knee.

Blinking in the swirling, sun-lit dust, he beheld Spurr, looking like nothing so much as a fierce old eagle. He was directing the lancers to close in, and Mike felt a sudden lifting surge of joy —here was war at its best. A level field, a strong horse between his knees, good men at his back, and a vital mission to perform. For get that ammunition he must, before the momentarily-expected soldiers of Napoleon III came bearing down to attack the tactically vital fords of the San Gorgio.

Amid the dusty haze ahead, he could distinguish certain shadowy forms, where el Hiena's rear guard was forming for a stand. He glimpsed two or three varieties of uniforms which lent credence to the rumor that this bold and ferocious bandit mob was being daily strengthened by deserters from the Republican as well as the Imperial and the French forces.

Fierce delight filled Mike's heart. Rising in his stirrups he turned, and with his saber swung in a glittering arc, signalled his men to form line. Quickly, the tireless lancer mustangs galloped out to either flank, a few strides behind those of the big, whiskered sergeants who spurred to the front, their red-crested brass helmets gleaming in the bright hot sun of Lower Mexico.

The young major's blue eyes flick-

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ered ahead again. Ha! El Hiena's rear guard was forming up fast.—Better get going before they were well set. Lord, but there were a lot of them over yonder, and they looked as though they intended to keep the ammunition at all costs! That made it interesting, since he also intended to have it at all costs. The defense of the fords was on his shoulders, and on a successful defense of the fords depended the security of General Benito Juarez's whole army.

"Going to be one hell of a good ruckus in a minute," yelled Spurr, above the jangle of equipment and the trample of many hoofs. "Wish your brother Andy was here.—He'd like this."

MIKE, bareheaded and looking very big and powerful on his golden bay, nodded vigorously as he raised the saber again and filled his lungs.

"Ready-y-y!" His voice rang out like the peal of a war trumpet; and amid a mad flutter of pennons, sixty-odd lancers swept to the horizontal, as in a single motion. In their saddles the brown-faced, black-haired Republican cavalrymen settled themselves more solidly behind their lance butts.

"Ch-a-a-rge!" Mike's saber flashed downward. The *encurados*—so called because at one time Mexican lancers had worn leather breast plates—were now in a compact line. They spurred their mounts and raised a long drawn yell of *"Viva la República!"*

Forward they raced, each man low in his saddle, like a jockey, and carrying his blue-white spear point well out in front. Off to the left, Lieutenant Sarolla, in direct command of the Jaliscans, was yelling like mad. He had lost his helmet, and his long blue-black hair was snapping in the air like a sable war flag amid the red horsehair crests of his men.

"Hi-yah! Yah! Yah!" Mike leaned low over his saddle pommel, just as his father had taught him, extended the long saber to full reach, and then touched his thoroughbred's flanks with his spurs. Outraged, el Aquila gathered his powerful quarters under him and sped forward, heading towards the center of that dense, vari-colored throng ahead.

"Hi-yah!" Again Mike's voice, much deeper than that of any Mexican, yelled out the old Second Dragoon war cry. El Aquila's hoofs were drumming madly now over the hard, yellow-brown earth, eating up the space like magic. Behind, the lancers were cheering with their thin, womanish voices.

Closer, closer! He could see the bandits advancing to meet the charge. Some were pulling out machetes and swords, some were unslinging carbines, and a few had lances—a motley array if ever there was one. But the guerrillas were even more numerous than he had imagined; Mike realized that with a sudden sense of apprehension.

FIFTY yards, ten yards. Deliberately, Mike singled out a big, black-bearded bandit who rode out in front. The rascal was still clad in a bedraggled green and yellow uniform—he was evidently a deserter from the Imperial Hussars. As old Colonel Lockheed had taught him, Mike aimed his saber point at the deserter's hairy throat, and set his whole weight behind the weapon. Black Beard saw him coming, read his intent, and levelled a huge pistol, reining aside his powerful black horse as he did so.

Two heart beats more, and that black bearded face, all yelling mouth

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and staring eyes, materialized just beyond el Aquila's pointed ears. The deserter's pistol cracked as loud as the report of a field piece, and something stirred Mike's red-yellow hair. Then, a brief fraction of an instant later, came a hoarse scream and a jarring, rending impact on his sword arm.

As one receives an impression during a flash of lightning, Mike sensed, rather than saw, the marauder's green-uniformed body bending far back over his saddle cantle, saw the black beard tilt skyward. Then he flipped over his wrist, knuckles uppermost, so as to allow his charger's impetus to clear the saber point. With surprising speed, the saddle of the snorting black was emptied.

Hardly had Mike returned his saber to the "on guard" position when el Aquila carried him headlong into the bandit ranks. There, a yellow-faced mulatto in a dirtied orange velvet bolero aimed a vicious slash at him with a machete. Barely in time, the young major's saber parried. Then Mike, rising in his stirrups, slashed in return, and felt his blade bite deep into the mulatto's yellow neck. Screaming like a slaughtered hog, the guerrilla slipped sidewise in his saddle, and was lost to sight in the press of conflict.

The hot, bright air quivered with sound. From the corners of his eyes, Mike had glimpses of pistols flashing, of horses rearing, backing and snapping at each other. With deadly accuracy, the long Jalisco lances were dipping and stabbing; and Mike, raging through the guerrilla ranks like a young Mars, heard one or two lances break as falling bodies snapped the stout pine shafts.

It was a very busy three minutes that followed. Then, with astonishing suddenness, the fight was over. But to Mike, all seemed confusion, noise—and above all, dust. Through a shifting, choking pall he could see sprawled bodies, abandoned weapons, shadowy riderless horses that galloped about, their eyes and nostrils wide with fright. A wounded bandit was squatting in the dust, rocking from side to side as he clutched his bloody head and shrieked, "*Dios! Dios! Dios!*"

Panting, thirst-tortured and sweat-bathed, Mike watched a squad of lancers engaged in running down the handful of guerrillas who had vainly sought safety in flight.

Like yellow hawks, the *encurados* swooped down on their prey. Now their yellow-and-red bodies gathered behind the lance butts as they braced for that powerful surge which would pierce the luckless guerrillas between the shoulder blades; and now came the thrust that sent them reeling out of the saddle, to roll over and over on the dusty brown grass.

"How—we fixed?" Mike gasped when Spurr cantered up through the dust haze, busily wiping his reddened saber blade on the mane of his horse.

"We ain't lost more than five or six, sir," he reported, and rubbed the dust and sweat from his forehead onto his red cuffs. "We sure gave them guerrillas a nice lacing."

"*Seguro.*" Mike grinned and beckoned his bugler. "Have the men form up, we'll resume the chase and have that damned ammunition back inside of fifteen minutes."

BUT it is well known that "man proposes and God disposes." Even as the triumphant lancers came trotting back to the rallying point, carefully picking their way over the fallen, tumbled bodies of their late enemies, Mike's restless blue eyes sudden-

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ly ceased their habitual inspection of the horizon. He stiffened in his brass-mounted saddle, as though one of the lancers had jabbed him.

"Great God, Spurr, look at that!" he cried, flinging out his arm to the left.

The veteran officer in brown whirled about and rapped out a string of curses. "It's the Frenchies—God help us!"

With the glazed eyes of despair, Major Mike Lockheed watched a column of horsemen trot out from the shelter of a steep arroyo off to the left. The prevailing colors of their uniforms were blue, gold and green; no room for hope that these men on the flank might be friendly.

"Yes," jerked Mike, reining in el Aquila. "French and Imperial lancers. Got to git, to save our necks.—Oh, *damn* the luck!"

As he watched the strange horsemen appear he realized, with a pang of despair, that victory had been snatched from his fingers. To continue to pursue the stolen ammunition would be to invite the complete annihilation of his force and himself. Characteristically, he lost not an instant in handling the bewildered little lancers.

"*Son los Imperialistas!* Ride for your lives! *Aprisa!* Back to the fords!" Slow-witted, the dusty *encurados* in yellow and red stared in incredulous amazement at this new foe who came charging forward as soon as they had spied their enemies, in a long, glittering column. Behind these appeared an even larger mass of infantry in uniforms of blue, red and white, and the latter immediately began to deploy with a skill that commanded the respect of Spurr, that hardened veteran of the Texan and Mexican wars.

"Real *soldados* over there," he yelled as he stopped to catch a loose horse for a dismounted lancer.

"*Andamos!*—Hurry!" Mike urged in furious Spanish.

At last aware of their acute peril, the dusty *encurados* wheeled their mustangs. With many a frightened look over their shoulders, they bent low in their saddles to spur back in the direction from which they had come.

Cursing with disappointment and apprehension, Mike lingered on the scene of his recent triumph until the last man had begun his flight.

"Pick a straight course!" he called to Lieutenant Sarolla as that wild-eyed officer went racing by. "Try to—make the fords."

"*Si,*" replied the Mexican, and galloped on, his right hand busy with the quirt. "But I—afraid—few of us—get there."

BITTERNESS welled like an acid spring into Mike's heart. Hell! The ammunition was now irreparably lost, and defeat loomed large on the horizon. For, as the thoroughbred bounded along, he foresaw how completely impossible it would be to hold the fords of the San Gorgio with the scanty supply of ammunition his men now possessed. Yet his orders had been that the fords must be held.

It wouldn't have been so bad, he told himself, if he could have been certain of one or two of his officers; but a number of things which had happened recently gave ground for bitter reflection. For instance, how could el Hiena have known by which route the ammunition was coming into the San Gorgio country? There were a dozen trails and roads, yet he had unerringly ambushed the right one.—There was a traitor somewhere, of course.

A hoarse shout from the rear lashed his thoughts back to the troubles of the present. He glanced backwards and

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smothered a bitter curse. Lord, how quickly those green uniformed lancers were coming up! Theirs were fresher horses of course. There must be at least a hundred of them, behind those blue-clad French officers.

Back past the deserted pack horses pounded the desperate chase.—Sarolla led the retreat, and Mike, gloomy-eyed, reined el Aquila in to the pace of the slowest *encurado*.

Just as a group of bare, treeless hills rose from among flat little prairies that reflected the sun's heat like mirrors, the first casualty occurred. The horse of an *encurado* put its foot into a hole and fell heavily, knocking its rider senseless.

"Poor devil!" thought Mike as he galloped past the struggling horse and the inert lancer. Too bad there was no time to save him, but the enemy were now not over two hundred yards behind. He *must not* get captured or killed, he must get back to his forces on the San Gorgio. Zapatos, Ribera and the rest never could be trusted to obey orders and hold the fords.

AHEAD of him he saw the fleeing *encurados* strung out in a long line, the strongest horses far in the lead, heading for that row of low, green hills which marked the course of the San Gorgio river. How familiar it all was. Mike found it strange to be fleeing for life through that same countryside where he and Andy had spent their late boyhood.

Damn! Tragedy was near at hand, for just ahead of him an *encurado* on a failing horse was thrashing the poor animal with the butt of his pistol in a desperate effort to keep up with the others. No use, the mustang's sweaty legs were wavering with fatigue and his hoofs landed with heavy, lifeless thuds. Mike caught a glimpse of a flat, brown face turning despairingly to the rear. Too well the lancer knew his fate if he fell into the hands of General Méjia's troopers.

Mike shouted to the *encurado* to pull up, but just as he did so a shot rang out, and the lancer pitched head foremost from the saddle. Only wounded, the yellow-clad fugitive staggered to his feet and started to limp off; but a pair of hussars in green veered from the main pursuit and quickly cut down the screaming wretch, in cold blood.

Mike ground his teeth in impotent fury, then reined in his charger, in spite of el Aquila's furious protests. When a gorgeous hussar sergeant came galloping up, swinging his curved sword, Mike turned and sent a pistol ball through the fellow's body. A touch of the spur, and el Aquila bounded away again, amid the furious yells of the pursuers.

"That evens the score a little," he told himself.

Only thirty-odd of the original sixty remained by the time the harried lancers dashed into a little valley where a rutted road wound between two high green hills.

"Now—our turn," Mike gasped to himself, and heaved a sigh of relief when a sudden volley from a dense clump of mesquite emptied a dozen of the hussar saddles to the rear.

Around wheeled the Imperialists, and dashed out of range amid a clatter of musket shots, leaving the hot earth littered with dead.

"First round's over," yelled Spurr, his black eyes watching the hussars' retreat to their main body. "All even—"

"Even, hell!" Mike was thoroughly alarmed. "What the devil are we going to use for ammunition?" He tried to conceal his anxiety, however, when

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three or four infantry officers ran up, among them his favorite subaltern, Roberto Escandón, a handsome young lieutenant of the *caçadores,* or Mexican light infantry of the time.

"*Qué hay?*" called the foremost officers. "Where is the ammunition?"

Briefly Mike described the disastrous end to the chase.

"Then all is lost, *señor comandante!*" declared a grizzled veteran of many a revolution. "We have not thirty rounds for each man. We must retreat before the French attack."

"Silence!" Trenchant as a saber was Mike Lockheed's command. "I'm giving the orders—understand, Captain Montojo? We'll not retreat until we get orders."

"Then may the Virgin take pity on us!" was the *caçadore* officer's bitter comment.

CHAPTER II.

BROTHERS.

FROM his bed, Colonel Frederick Lockheed, late of the Second United States Dragoons, and now a prosperous cattle rancher, raised inquisitive steel gray eyes when his tall younger son stalked into the room. The ex-soldier was gray-haired and there were blue-black circles under his piercing eyes. A man of sixty-five cannot suffer a broken leg and three broken ribs without showing it.

"Well, Michael," snapped the master of Las Estrellas as he struggled up on one elbow, wheezing with the pain of the effort, "did you get back the ammunition?"

At the foot of the handsomely carved four-poster bed, Mike paused and shook his dusty head.

"No, sir. The French came in on our flank just as we cut up el Hiena's rear guard. We had to ride hell for leather.—It's a hell of a war when they murder prisoners. There must be a gang of butchers over there—not soldiers!"

A bleak, reminiscent smile crossed the veteran's face. "War in Mexico never was played to rule—not since Cortez landed.—Well?"

"Looks like we'll have to give up the ford."

"You can't do that, Michael," said his father grimly. "Remember the motto of our family, 'Always obey orders.' You've been ordered to hold that ford."

"Always obey orders." Mike wondered how many times he had heard his father say that—five or six thousand times at least.

"I only wish to hell you hadn't tried to ride that blasted mustang. I'm damned if I know what to do, Dad," he said, dropping wearily into a chair by the bedside. "Méjia's expedition is already here, and we've only thirty rounds per man."

The crippled veteran stirred impatiently, a pale shadow in the darkened room. "Yes, it's too bad, son. Especially since most of old Juarez's men are ready to quit. He's a game old cuss, and he deserves more help than he'll get. If the French don't set an emperor over Mexico, Benito Juarez will be the only one to thank for it. So you'll have to do your job somehow."

"What am I going to do?" Mike repeated, weary eyes on his father's sunken features.

"Use your head," advised Colonel Lockheed. "It's by using our heads that we Lockheeds have made good soldiers ever since America was settled."

"Where's Carolina?" Mike peered

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about the shadowy bedroom. "Thought she was here."

"She was, but she went out for some medicine and to have a talk with the foreman of her ranch. Naturally, he's terrified of what the French will do if they cross the San Gorgio." The old man's craggy features hardened. "Of course I didn't tell her they'll loot and burn Los Flamencos as thoroughly as they will Las Estrellas."

The young officer's reddish head lifted sharply and his sunburnt lips grew tight.

"Well, they won't burn either of them as long as I'm alive. We'll defend those fords to the last man."

Colonel Lockheed chuckled. "That's better. I only wish Andrew was here. Why the devil did you boys have to go fall in love with the same girl?"

MIKE shrugged and blinked, momentarily shutting out the wide bed, the glimmering candle and his father's pain-lined brown features. How clearly he could visualize Andy; lithe as a puma and handsome as a Roman centurion. How distinctly he could hear his brother's voice saying, "Now, look here, Mike, we both love Carolina, and it doesn't help matters that she can't make up her mind which one of us she wants. I want her so badly I know I'll get to hate you, maybe try to kill you, if I stay. We've been too close for that, Mike."

How Andy's sensitive gray eyes had shone with suffering. Mike could hear himself replying, "I feel just the same way, Andy.—What are we going to do about it?"

"One of us has got to clear out," the elder brother had said. "Then Carolina can marry the other—"

With surprising quickness the situation had been solved.

"Look there," Andy had said, pointing to a goldfish which lay drowsing beneath a lily pad in a little pool which occupied the center of the patio at Las Estrellas, "I reckon that fish will move pretty soon. If he goes to the right, I'll go away. If he goes to the left, you go."

And so they had stood there a long ten minutes, nerves brittle and eyes fixed on that gleaming little fish. At length, having spied a succulent fly which had fallen into the water, the fish gave a brief flip of its tail, thereby changing the destinies of three human lives by darting off to the right.

"So long, Bud. Be good to Carolina—she—she—" Suddenly Andy had held out his hand with a smile that had wrung the younger brother's heart. "Reckon I'd best be saddlin' up. See you in 'bout five years, maybe— Name one of 'em after Uncle Andy—won't you?"

"Surest thing you know, Bud!"

And then tall and handsome Brother Andy had quietly saddled up and loped off, to be swiftly lost among the purple-red sunset shadows of the rugged Oaxaca hills.

But Mike and Carolina had not named any children after Uncle Andy, for the very good reason that, not being married, they had no children.

In the hallway outside the bedroom sounded the resonant tramp of cavalry boots, and some one rapped softly on the carved door panel behind Mike.

"*Qué hay?*" he called.

"Captain Ribera, *Señor Comandante,* wishes to report that the French have sent a flag of truce. Their commander was brought here blindfolded and wishes to speak with you."

Mike looked up suddenly, and his shadow cast by the candle on the table by the bedside mimicked him.

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"Very well," he called. "I will see him in a few minutes."

"Yes, talk to the Frenchman," advised the old man. "But be careful—those French are the best soldiers in Europe. Be careful, and use your head—it's your only chance."

"I'll try, sir. I—I want to save you and Carolina if I can. These French are said to be merciless." Mike nodded once, then he gently closed the bedroom door.

IN the main living room of Las Estrellas he found Captains Ribera, Zapatos and Martinez, those officers of his who had just returned from their fruitless search for the guerrillas along the left bank of the San Gorgio.

In the sunlit interior, the dark-featured officers seemed very ill at ease. They were staring fixedly at a huge, sunburned and bearded N. C. O. in a blue and red uniform, with crossed belts of white. He stood stiffly erect, just inside the front door of the ranch house. A red topped *képi* was clutched in his gauntleted right hand, and in the other a white flag knotted to a tree branch.

"Where is the commander?" Mike inquired of Spurr as he strode forward, his tarnished silver epaulets on a level with the eyes of his dark-faced staff officers.

"He's on his way," replied the gaunt Texan who alone approached Mike in size. Even as he spoke, a sentinel outside the door challenged with a hoarse "*Quién es?*" Voices muttered briefly, then the door latch clicked and an officer appeared in the doorway. So tall as nearly to fill the door frame, he was clad in a heavy blue uniform, on the breast of which glittered a single row of bright gold buttons. His collar was red trimmed with green, and gold epaulets rode broad, powerful shoulders.

Ex-Sergeant Spurr uttered a whistling gasp of surprise and stared as at a ghost. "God blast my eyes! Why—why, Mr. Andy, what in hell you doing in that French uniform?"

But the newcomer answered not a word. His sunburned, unshaven features, so strangely like those of the commander in red, were set in lines of iron as he stepped inside, eyes riveted on those of his brother.

With the stiff motions of a mechanical man, Andrew Lockheed raised his hand in stiff salute, his bronzed face utterly devoid of expression. As in a daze, Mike beheld a sharp-faced and bespectacled French lieutenant who now appeared at Andy's left, follow suit.

With a conscious effort, Mike returned the salute while his eyes bored into the beloved features of that brother he had not seen in four years. Mechanically, he smiled and said:

"*Buenas dias, señores,* you may come in without fear. We of the Republican Army always respect the flag of truce."

IN the background Ex-Sergeant Spurr stood very still, surveying the scene with mingled emotions. He alone, of the glittering group in that low-ceiled room, fully appreciated the deep tragedy of the situation. He, as few others, knew of that inflexible code under which Colonel Lockheed had brought up his sons.

"Thank you, sir," gravely replied he in the dust-spotted blue uniform. "I am Captain Lockheed, commanding the third company of the First Regiment of the Imperial Foreign Legion; and I have the honor to bear a message for the officer commanding such troops as may be guarding the fords of San Gorgio."

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Making a brief bow, Mike replied, "I am Major Lockheed, sir; and I have the honor to command the troops you mention."

The grim farce continued, and Spurr's jet eyes were stony when the man in the green-trimmed blue uniform bowed again and said stiffly, "Permit me, sir, to present my lieutenant—Andre La Marche."

"I am deeply honored, *monsieur le commandant,*" quoth the lieutenant.

"And I, also," supplemented Mike with a mirthless smile. "This is Jake Spurr, my aide, late of the Second United States Dragoons, and provisional lieutenant in the Republican Army."

Mike found it hard to think, let alone to speak. Inside his head whirled a maelstrom of thoughts and emotions, which churned and seethed like working yeast. Campaigning against the French Imperial Army was one thing, but fighting a force led by his beloved brother was quite another.

How queer Andy looked in that heavy blue uniform with his gold buttons, green trimmings, rakish red-topped *képi,* and dusty, high cavalry boots. He was as lean and sunburnt as of yore, and there was the same reckless light playing at the back of those clear, gray-blue eyes. But about the mouth Mike noted some new and bitter lines, lines that might have been caused by long, lonely nights spent beneath foreign skies; lines that might have been caused by longings for a girl whom he thought to be forever lost. And Mike was aware that Andy was studying him no less curiously; no doubt finding him unfamiliar in this war-stained and theatrically gaudy red cavalry uniform.

"Well," Mike said suddenly, "please set yourselves at ease. And please forgive our having blindfolded you. I didn't want to miss the opportunity for a very pleasant little skirmish, which might have been the case had you been overawed by our numbers," he added with the ghost of a smile.

"We are delighted, *monsieur le commandant,*" said Lieutenant La Marche. "Le Captaine Lockheed has been telling me something of this beautiful country. I believe he has spent some time here." The sunburnt and powerful Frenchman twirled a little brown moustache, and from behind his gleaming glasses shot a shrewd sidewise glance at Mike, as though to hint that he could be counted upon to carry out his part of this tragi-comedy.

STILL Andrew gave no sign of recognition. He bowed briefly to Mike's staff, which, hurriedly dusted off, stood gazing with undisguised curiosity at these self-assured and coolly superior foreigners.

"Well, Captain Lockheed, we await your message," stated Mike, standing very straight by the desk which for four years had been locked upon Andy's private papers.

"Merely this," said Andy in a loud and penetrating voice, "General Lorençez of the Imperial French Army has sent me to reëstablish peace and order throughout the state of Oaxaca. Too long has Mexico been the victim of self-seeking politicians.—France has unwillingly decided, in the interests of humanity, to put a stop to this reign of lawlessness.

"I, as an officer of Napoleon III, have come to urge you to surrender peacefully the fords of San Gorgio. My column is well armed, and is accompanied by three troops of lancers; my legionaries are the best infantry in the Imperial Service—vet-

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erans who can outshoot, man for man, any troops in the world."

Andy was speaking, Mike noticed, with an earnestness which held something more than the anxiety of an officer who desired to carry out successfully his mission.

"At the first practicable moment," the officer in blue continued, "my column, aided by a strong force of cavalry, will advance upon and seize the ford of San Gorgio, according to orders." He paused, as though to give additional emphasis to his next words, then dropped his voice to a solemn pitch. "If we meet with opposition, even of the slightest, I have General Lorençez's direct orders to exterminate the enemy, to ravage the entire countryside and to execute"—his voice quivered a little "—*all rebel officers found under arms* and operating against the provisional government of President Miramón."

As the Legion officer's announcement was ended, cries of mingled astonishment, resentment and fear arose from the brown-faced officers grouped behind Mike Lockheed's stalwart red form. Undoubtedly, Andy's threat had gone home.

Mike realized that his task was made no easier thereby. Fumbling furiously in his mind, he bowed ironically to his brother—a jerky little bow—and swallowed hard. God above! Andy had practically said he was going to burn Las Estrellas and hang his own brother!

How queer he felt! The long, low room seemed to have become suffocatingly hot all of a sudden . . . What devilish irony that he and one of the three beings he most loved should be thus flung at each other in merciless combat. It did not seem to be his own voice that said:

"What, then, do you advise, Captain Lockheed?"

AGAIN that burning earnestness crept into the Legion officer's manner. "Either surrender your arms, or retire beyond the Texiaco range. In the latter case," he continued, an unspoken appeal in his wide-set eyes, "I swear that the country will remain unharmed; the *haciendas* will not be burnt and peace and order will be maintained under French administration until such time as your new emperor, Maximilian I, the Hapsburg prince, who is a younger brother of Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary, reaches these shores. Then, when His Imperial Majesty is firmly installed, the troops of France will be withdrawn."

As Andy's voice fell silent, a babble of staccato Spanish burst out to one side. A half contemptuous smile spread over Lieutenant La Marche's thin, aristocratic countenance. Understanding Spanish well, he quickly sensed the eagerness of certain of Mike Lockheed's Juarista officers to avoid the conflict in the offing. Quite correctly, he assumed that many of these gayly uniformed *caballeros* owned ranches and *haciendas* in the immediate vicinity. Naturally, they thought first of their property.

For a moment, Mike stood in rigid, miserable silence. Then, clearing his voice, he said, "Sir, we thank you for your consideration and gallantry in warning us of your intent; but on the other hand, we hold orders from President-General Juarez to defend the fords of the San Gorgio to the end of our power. We are therefore"— he drew a deep breath— "determined to dispute the passage of the ford.—And since we seem to be at a stalemate, I

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suggest, Señor Capitán," he nodded to his brother, "that we retire to deliberate in private."

"Very well."

A deep stillness reigned in that crowded little whitewashed room while the brothers, the one in red and the other in dusty blue, pulled aside a blue-and-white hanging and stalked in grim silence through a door to the left.

CHAPTER III.

OBEDIENCE.

IT was not until the two stalwart commanders of [illegible] so strangely alike and yet so unlike, stood in that familiar study decorated with the trophies of Colonel Lockheed's thirty years of army experience, that they unbent from their rigidly correct military manner. On the walls about them gleamed colorful Creek war bonnets, Seminole headdresses made of gorgeous egret plumes, sabers, helmets, pistols captured during the Texan war. But the two brothers saw none of these. Of equal height, they stood gazing at each other; then, without a word, they flung long, wiry arms about each other and hugged as they had when, as children, some adventure had separated them for a few days.

"Andy!" cried Mike. "You old son of a gun. Lord, I am glad to see you. I've been turning the *República* upside down, looking for you these last three years. Where in hell have you been?"

The other one sighed, and his gray eyes wandered beyond the curiously wrought iron bars of the window. "I wouldn't have come home for a while, Mike; but I suppose it's fate. When I joined the Foreign Legion in Algeria, who in hell would have thought it would be ordered to Mexico inside a couple of years?" Andy's eyes, a little grayer and less blue than Mike's, suddenly sought his brother's, and there paused in unspoken inquiry.

"Carolina is well—lovelier than ever," Mike said, and nervously fingered his tarnished silver belt.

"I'm very glad of that.—Are there —have you any children?"

"No," replied Mike somberly. "It—Well, it was a damned big mistake, your going away—"

"What— Then—" As though a bullet had struck him, Andrew Lockheed's long body stiffened beneath the dust-powdered blue uniform, and the heavy gold epaulets on his shoulders shimmered briefly. "She didn't—you aren't—?"

Solemnly, Mike shook his sunburnt red head. "It wasn't long after you'd vamoosed that Carolina and I became engaged; but somehow, things weren't quite right. Both of us felt it, and then poor Carolina realized that it was you she really loved—" Mike choked a little.

"Please go on," said Andy, in that peculiar monotone some men use under stress of great emotion.

Mike's weatherstained silver epaulets rose under a little shrug. "Well, we stalled for time—put off the wedding to give me time to hunt for you. I looked everywhere—even up in Texas and down in Honduras—until this blasted war broke out."

"Good old Mike!" murmured the other, and his hand closed over Mike's. "You always were a good sport."

"But I didn't find you, of course. We're still officially engaged, otherwise Carolina's *padre* would have married her off to young Sandoval. You know —that smooth young *caballero* from the city. I tell you, Bud, it's been mighty hard finding excuses to postpone that wedding."

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"Carolina!" In Andy's gaunt, deeply tanned face burned a feverish anxiety. "Carolina still free.—God, Mike, how I've hungered and thirsted for a sight of her these last four years! I used to lie out in the desert, back in Barbary, and wonder what you two were doing. It never occurred to me that you weren't hitched up long ago. I figured you'd have a herd of kids playing all over the house. Where—where is she?"

A RATHER grim smile lit Mike's features. "She's here, *soldado,* here nursing Dad. A mustang fell on the old *caballero* a couple of weeks ago, smashed his left leg and a couple of ribs."

"What! Carolina here at Las Estrellas? Good God, Mike, she's in danger here!—You should have sent her away."

"She wouldn't go; you know what she's like—a real thoroughbred. Besides, her *padre* moved their rancho down the San Gorgio, until it's only three kilometers below us, here on the plateau. He calls it Los Flamencos, now."

A heavy silence invaded the little library while on Andrew's sun-darkened face appeared an expression of anguish.

"Good God, Mike!" he muttered at last. "I'm in a hell of a fix.—As I've told you, I have orders to burn both Las Estrellas and Los Flamencos, and hang you and your officers, if I catch you."

"Well," remarked Mike, "I don't notice you taking that ford yet."

Andy's dark head snapped up and he looked a little taken aback. "Mike! Surely you aren't fool enough to think you can hold that ford against me? Why, I have under my command two hundred picked men of the best troops in the world. Besides, I've two hundred troopers of the crack *fijo de Méjico* lancers."

Mike managed a confident laugh. "They aren't enough, Andy. My troops are veterans, too; and they'll fight to the last gasp. But aside from all this, whichever way the cat jumps we're in a bad way regarding each other. For you see, my orders are to hold this ford and to execute any French officers I capture, in retaliation for the orders you've been given."

"Look here," cried Andy hoarsely. "Can't we—can't we do something about this?—We can't carry out such orders. Let's both resign."

Mike slowly shook his reddish blond head, and his shadow mimicked him on the white plaster wall behind. "You wouldn't do it, and I wouldn't do it. We Lockheeds don't resign in the face of the enemy. Dad would disown us both if we did. Suppose we go in and see the old gentleman. Maybe he'll have a suggestion. It'll have to be a brief visit, Andy. Our respective officers will be wondering what the hell."

"Yes," agreed the older brother, "I've got to be getting back to my command."

THE spurs on the dusty boot heels of the brothers jingled softly on the red tile floor as they quit the library. Solemn of manner, they made their way to that spacious bedroom in which the grizzled ex-colonel of the Second United States Dragoons lay on his bed of pain. As his deep-set eyes beheld that second tall figure in the doorway, he struggled up on one elbow, then sank back with a stifled groan which prompted a tall young woman by his side to speak with gentle severity.

"*Tío Fréderico,* you must lie still. It is only Don Mike."

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"No, no!" choked the old man. "Look!"

And then Carolina de Fonseca's slender, white-clad figure straightened.

"Andrew!" The exclamation was punctuated by the crash of a glass of medicine which fell from her hand to shatter itself on the antelope skin beneath her small feet. "*Madre de Dios!* It is not possible!"

She made a dramatic and unforgettable figure. Completely clad in white, though her dress was no whiter than her face, she stood gazing from enormous dark eyes at that powerful, soldierly figure filling the doorway.

"Andrew!" With a smothered cry she darted around the foot of the great bed, and an instant later Andrew Lockheed's dusty blue arms were about her and his hard, sunburned lips were pressing fierce, hungry kisses on the vivid softness of her mouth.

Mike stood to one side, gazing fixedly out of the bedroom window. Apparently he was absorbed in watching pigeons flutter from a dovecote across the patio, to drink at the edge of the fountain.

Suddenly Colonel Lockheed's voice broke in. "Mike, is that a French uniform your brother has on?"

"Yes, sir." Like a private replying to his colonel, Mike Lockheed straightened.

"Then what is he doing here?" demanded the old man, his parchment colored features set. "Since when has a Lockheed permitted an enemy to enter his quarters?"

"He came under the flag of truce, sir. We have been parleying. Since he was here, I saw no good reason why he shouldn't see you and Carolina."

It was then that Carolina sprang back, eyes wide with distress. "*Dios de Dios!* What is this?—A French uniform? You must take it off, Andrew! You must never go back—never leave me again. Ah, my heart's own—!"

Slowly, Andy's black head shook. "Sorry, darling, but we don't do things that way. In a few minutes I've got to go back across the river; and then I'll have to do my best to burn this rancho—and yours, too—if Mike and his men make the least attempt at resistance."

IT was to Mike, standing very tall and glum, that the poor distracted girl now fluttered.

"Mike, Mike! You who are always so generous, so gentle, so *caballero*, surely you know that our poor *soldados* cannot stand against the French. You will order the retreat and so avoid this mad encounter—no?"

And now it was the younger brother's yellow-red head that shook in sharp negation.

"Impossible, little Carolina. I have my orders from President-General Juarez himself—the ford must be held at all costs."

"This is criminal, stupid, infamous!" There was the wail of a breaking heart in Carolina's voice; and more than anything that had yet transpired, it moved the two brothers. They turned in unspoken appeal to that powerful old figure outlined beneath the bed sheets, and saw written there a reflection of the anguish which Carolina felt.

"Surely, Dad," began Andrew, "there must be some way?"

But the iron gray head shook. "Obey orders, my boy—always obey orders. I'll not hold it against you if you take this rancho and burn it to the ground. You will only be doing what

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I've taught you since you were old enough to talk. All I can say is—" his voice broke a little "—all I can say is—that you must both do your duty as you see it."

"No! no! no!" Carolina flung herself upon Andy, winding white arms about his big chest and pressing her tear-stained cheek against the cold, glittering buttons there. "I will not let you go again. *Dios de Merced!* What if you were killed, now that you have come back to me? Retreat, Andrew! You must, I implore you! Why should you lay down your life to force the French emperor's rule on my people?"

With a bronzed hand that trembled a little, Andrew stroked Carolina's lustrous black hair. Then he lifted her chin and gazed a moment into her swimming eyes. "*Adios,* darling, I—I must be going."

It was then that Carolina gave a tired sigh and sagged limp in Andy's blue clad arms. Swiftly Andy roused himself, kissed the unconscious girl, and gave her over to Mike.

"Take care of her, Mike," he said in a strangely thick voice. "Get her out of the way. For, God help me, I—I am going to attack—as hard and as soon as I can."

He extended a bronzed right hand, first to the old knight on the bed, and next to his brother. Then, with a faint jangle of spurs, he executed an about-face and stalked from the room.

CHAPTER IV.

TRAITORS.

FIVE years older did Mike Lockheed seem as the sun, before its almost meteoric disappearance from the sky, hovered for an instant above the sharp crags of Santa Lucrecia. The last rays, beating in through the library windows of Las Estrellas, lit the weary features of the little council of war. A home-made map, roughly drawn by Mike Lockheed but amazingly accurate, was being studied.

Bending over the red-uniformed commandant, Spurr and el Lobo, the Yaqui chieftain, followed the frayed point of the quill pen with which Mike was emphasizing his remarks. Curiously enough, there were no Mexican officers present; Mike had deemed it wiser to be discreet about his plans.

"Now," Mike was saying, "here's what seems most likely to happen. The French will have to camp dry, or retire five miles to get water. It's a cinch they won't dare come down to the ford to-night, for fear of being ambushed; and the cañon is too steep anywhere else. Andy — er — the French commandant knows this. Right now they are halted; but I'm sure they're short of water and must fall back. Don't tell this to the rest of our crowd. I want them to think— Hello, what's that?"

From outside had sounded the clank of *accoutrement* and the trampling of many horses.

"Reckon that'll be Zapatos and Ribera and the rest, back from their wild goose chase," remarked Spurr somberly. "Hope they ain't wore out the hosses."

"They'd better not have," said Mike briskly. "Go out and order 'em not to let their men unsaddle; we're pulling out for Conino at sundown."

"Conino?"

"What?" The mahogany-faced Texan veteran nearly swallowed his quid; and even the Yaqui looked up quickly, though otherwise he betrayed no amazement.

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"What the hell!" Spurr cried.

"That will do, lieutenant," cut in the red-haired commander swiftly. "I know what our men can do—and what they can't do. The French force would simply massacre us, even if we had plenty of ammunition."

"*Bueno,*" grunted the Indian. "El Lobo will do as his brother commands. The Yaquis will be ready to ride at sundown."

"But, major," protested Spurr, "we could put up a good scrap maybe. It 'll look bad—"

"Maybe it will," snapped Mike, "but I won't have my force annihilated. If we stood a ghost of a chance it 'd be different—"

"But, but—" stammered the Texan, spreading horny hands in protest "—we got orders to hold this here ford."

"That's enough, lieutenant. Go out and transmit my orders."

Ex-Sergeant Spurr's narrow mouth shut with a click and a certain contemptuous gleam crept into his eyes, though his hand went up in salute. Then he whirled about, going through the door, his huge dragoon's saber clattering in its war-worn scabbard.

"My brother needs me no longer?" inquired the Yaqui chieftain.

"Not right now," said Mike somberly. "Go and wait for orders, Captain Lobo."

FIVE minutes later el Comandante Lockheed was announcing to the rest of his officers his determination to retreat.

"*Nombre de Dios!* But this is cowardly nonsense," angrily protested Zapatos, the captain of Jalisco lancers. "As we rode in, we saw the French turning back.—They are in full retreat."

"So much the better. They are probably going to report back to the main column," explained Mike quickly. "At present it may be they fear us. Later they may return with many cannon and reënforcements. That is why I am falling back on Conino. We must have more men, more ammunition. The fords are safe enough now."

"Ah, I see," commented Captain Ribera, and nodded his brass helmeted head thoughtfully. "But is it not unwise to leave the ford and these ranches unguarded? What of guerrillas and bandits? Does it not invite raid?"

"There is nothing to fear since el Hiena is in full flight, to the south. You yourself reported so. That is right, is it not?"

"*Pero sí.*" The burnished brass helmet nodded so that its scarlet horsehair crest stirred lazily. "The bandit, may God blacken his face, is far down the San Gorgio valley. There is nothing to fear from him."

"Then we march in half an hour. To your units, gentlemen."

It was a bad five minutes Mike had with his father when the old man heard that he was retreating.

"Afraid of old Boney's légionnaires, eh? Or is it Carolina's whimpering that's made you forget your duty? Get out of here, you cowardly hound!" the enraged old man roared. "Get out and stay out! If I could walk, I'd kick you out. If you think you're doing me a favor by retreating, you're not. I'd rather have a hundred ranches burnt than have one coward for a son. Get to hell out of here—and don't come back!"

Red faced and furious, Mike had endured the tongue lashing, well aware that the colonel's parade ground voice was carrying out into the shady patio where his officers were taking a fare-

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well drink of that cool Madeira which was Colonel Lockheed's favorite beverage.

DUSK was settling fast when the little Republican force turned their backs on the fords they had been ordered to hold at all costs and, leaving behind the hospitable golden yellow lights of Las Estrellas, set off along a winding trail which led up to distant Conino. It was all very silently done, and save for the occasional snuffling of a horse or the faint jangle of its equipment, the maneuver was well carried out.

"Why do you remain in the rear?" Ribera called out when Mike pulled rein and halted to let pass the helmeted, red-clad dragoons who acted as rear guard. These gaudily uniformed men looked like so many hawk-headed monstrosities in the gloom as, hunched forward in their high saddles, they set their shoulders against the pounding of the heavy little carbines slung across their backs.

"Just want to see that no stragglers drop behind," Mike nodded affably. "Ride on, captain; and tell the lancers up ahead to increase the pace. If we're to get to Conino by dawn we'll have to keep up a four-kilometer walk."

"Why not send an orderly?" demanded Ribera, a little truculently. "I would rather keep an eye on my men, I am no messenger boy."

"Do as I say!—And you, lieutenant," Mike called to Escandón, "ride into the center of the column and see that this eternal jamming up is stopped, or some of the horses will get kicked and put out of action."

Accompanied only by his aide, the lean Texan called Spurr, Mike gradually dropped further and further to the rear, until a good half kilometer separated him from the last dragoons in the column. He was very alert now, for in a few minutes more the column would be among the rocky hills now looming black ahead. Once among them, there could be no turning off the trail.

"Come on," he said sharply to Spurr, "drop this damned sulkiness. I won't have it! Keep your eyes skinned—I'm expecting some fun in a minute—"

"Yes, sir," said ex-Sergeant Spurr, but his manner changed not at all.

"We'll halt here.—Now listen—"

The two horsemen stood in silence for perhaps five minutes. The clatter of hoofs in the distant column was growing fainter when all at once a solitary dragoon appeared, a black shape against the gray hillsides. He was proceeding cautiously and kept peering to the right and to the left.

"Shall I wing him, sir?" muttered Spurr, sliding his Winchester from its boot. "That hombre's a deserter."

"No," was Mike's astonishing reply. "Let him alone. I want him to get away—he's more than a deserter."

Each of the silent watchers gripped his horse's ear to prevent a possible neigh, and they hugged the shadow of a willow bush as the messenger of treachery drew nearer, letting his horse pick its own course. Not a hundred feet away the dragoon turned off the trail, spurred his mount and moved off to the south at a cautious trot.

"And there," murmured Mike, "goes Fate in the shape of a traitor. Blast his yellow soul to hell!—Keep that horse quiet!—We'll have to let this hombre get well away before we make a move. It 'd spoil everything to let him suspect anything. When we rejoin the column, I want you to take

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the boys from the ranch and cover the head and the tail of the column. I'll give Captain Lobo orders that the Yaquis are to cover the flanks. No one is to leave the column from now on. Kill any one who tries it. *Any* one, understand?"

"Yessir," said Spurr, and grinned in the dark.

WHEN the little force had been on the march a long two hours, Mike made his way to the "point" and peered about, obviously in search of land marks. Presently he turned his horse off the beaten track to Conino.

"*Qué hay?*" demanded the lancer captain. "This is not the way to Conino."

"It's a *new* way," explained Mike briefly. "Last fall, when I was antelope shooting, I discovered this new route. It will get us into Conino two hours sooner than the old way."

"I—I protest," hotly objected Ribera, who came galloping up. "You may lose your way. I insist that we follow the regular road!"

Mike straightened in his saddle. "*I'm* giving the orders here.—Get back to your post, sir!"

On through the darkness blundered the little column, until all at once it dawned upon even the densest of the *muchachos* in the column that they were not headed for Conino at all, but for some point, the secret of which lay concealed in the agile brain of Mike Lockheed alone.

Great was the astonishment, and perhaps disgust, of certain of those dark-featured officers who rode with Mike when, with the rising of a waning moon, they beheld in the empty distance that deep gorge, like the Grand Cañon, through which the Rio San Gorgio pursued its course. Presently they came to the very correct conclusion that Don Mike Lockheed had been leading them through the barren uplands in a wide circle, and that by a little brisk marching they could arrive back at the fords of the San Gorgio in a short half hour.

"*Es loco.* He is mad," the officers muttered angrily, and Captain Ribera's mahogany-hued features were furious in the shade of his helmet's visor. On the other hand, Lieutenant Spurr's frown had disappeared like dew before the sun, and at the corners of his rat trap of a mouth was the same admiring twist that had been there on the morning when, as a sergeant, he realized how cleverly old Colonel Lockheed had posted the Second Dragoons at Buena Vista.

Twice, during the hours that followed, did the watchful, panther-footed Yaquis who prowled on the outskirts of the encampment pull from the saddle certain ill-favored Mexicans. These, with masterly carelessness, had been caught in the act of straying away from the lightless bivouac. At such times, knives glimmered briefly; and after that the skulkers became quite still.

AT last, Captain Ribera drew near the stone on which Mike sat, deep in thought, his eyes on the drowsing horses and the prone figures of his infantry. Mike noted that the dragoon captain's features were quivering by the eerie light of the moon.

"This is an insult, *señor comandante*," he growled. "Why have you made fools of us this way? Why have you posted those terrible savages on our flanks? One of them nearly knifed me just now!"

Mike heaved his long frame to its feet, a dangerously tight smile curving his lips.

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"Well, my dear captain, I'm sorry that my precautions against el Hiena's surprising us annoys you." He took a step forward, his curly hair tossed by the strong wind which at night swept that region. "Do you know, it's really amazing how clever that guerrilla is? A real mind reader he seems to be. So far," he emphasized the words, "he seems to have been able to foresee everything I intended to do.—It astonishes you, doesn't it, my dear captain?"

"*Madre de Dios!*" snarled Ribera. "You shall answer for this foolishness!—You will learn what it means to insult a loyal Mexican gentleman."

"Indeed?" As he spoke, Mike's hand was tapping lightly the holster of that heavy Colt which in other days had hung at the belt of his father, Colonel Lockheed, and in the moonlight his blue eyes were terrible as he said, "Loyal, eh? Then surely you won't object to my searching you?"

"No!—You shall die for this."

Clawing at his holstered pistol, Captain Ribera sprang back. But unfortunately for him, it was to land in the sinewy arms of ex-Sergeant Spurr.

"Steady, you damned grease ball, or I'll break your dirty neck!"

"Search him," directed Mike. "Guards, arrest this man!"

While the rest of the Mexican officers looked on in mingled horror and dismay, the rangy Texan fumbled beneath the dragoon's yellow uniform, presently to produce from its coat lining a few sheets of paper which bore the indubitable evidence which warranted the prompt hanging that ensued.

BUT all was not easy in Mike's mind when that grotesque black figure dangling from the ceiba tree at last swung quiet. In the last moments before he was swung to Eternity, Ribera managed to push out the gag; and amid furious incriminations, he screamed:

"You to-day, but el Hiena to-morrow! El Hiena will avenge me, and you will die such a death as mothers will use for frightening their children!"

"Too bad," Mike said as he passed Escandón, the likeable young lieutenant of *caçadores* who commanded the infantry. "Don't take it too hard."

The Mexican was sitting with face buried in his hands, but he looked up when Mike halted.

"*Dios!*" he cried bitterly. "Another traitor. No wonder the Gringos despise us! What curse is there on my people that so few of them can be true to their country? Oh, *comandante,*" he held out an imploring hand, "I pray you to please believe that we are not all like this swine! Hundreds of us would die a dozen deaths for the cause of our country's liberty."

"Never mind, *amigo,*" Mike said gravely, "there are traitors in every army. I am trusting you as I would my father."

Already the eastern mountains were showing up with greater clarity, and as he stalked through the encampment, Mike realized that it was only a question of a short hour before he and Andrew would hurl themselves at each other's throats in a grim struggle that must end in death for one or for the other, unless—?

CHAPTER V.

AT THE FORD.

A WOOLLY, gray-white mist was still rising from that miniature grand cañon, through which flowed the Rio San Gorgio, while Comandante Lockheed strode back

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and forth. He was all-seeing and all-anticipating, as he marshalled his forces. Still enclosed in that ring of silent Yaquis, the Republican force left their horses behind and moved off to the rocky heights behind the ford. There, by the fading moonlight, they deployed, some taking cover in the dry part of the river bed itself, and others sheltering themselves behind tangled heaps of stone. The main body, however, Mike concealed along the crest of that bluff which commanded not only the ford, but the trail leading upwards to Las Estrellas, some three kilometers distant.

It was with a skill and sureness which commanded the esteem of that hardy veteran ex-Sergeant Spurr, that Mike threw out an extended line of skirmishers to the rear, and well out on either flank. For that last warning of the traitorous dragoon constantly rankled in his mind. He could visualize clearly that straggler whom he and Spurr had permitted to escape, as the fellow galloped off to tell el Hiena that both French and Republicans had retreated, leaving the immensely rich rancho of Las Estrellas quite defenseless.

That el Hiena would soon come riding onto the scene with his fourteen hundred cutthroats, Mike fondly hoped. What troubled him was just when and from what direction the wily guerrilla would appear. It ought to be soon, for the blood-thirsty rascal was very fond of dawn attacks; in fact, was celebrated for them.

His plan was a good one, Mike realized, yet the very cleverness of his maneuver was its greatest weakness. Let one single element fall short of perfect achievement and his intricate calculations—well, at least he would be no worse off than he had been before making this desperate attempt to wring victory from seemingly inevitable defeat.

Hatless, pistol in hand, he ranged back and forth above the ford, personally superintending the disposal of the barefooted little *soldados*. And when the plovers commenced to whistle in the fields and the quail began to call their cheery notes, there was nothing to indicate that in the vicinity of the ford some four hundred very apprehensive men were tightly clutching their dew-covered rifles and waiting for the last dawn that many of them would ever see.

PANTING, dripping with sweat, Mike at last flung himself down on the dewy grass between Lieutenant Escandón and Captain Zapatos. To them he said:

"You understand your missions clearly, gentlemen? When White, my bugler here," he indicated another one of those men from the ranch who formed his personal bodyguard, "blows a single note, your men are to prepare to fire. When he blows a second time, they are to fire and to keep on until he sounds 'cease firing.'"

"*Sí, señor comandante.*" Escandón's teeth glimmered in the fading darkness. "I am hoping that—"

"Quiet!" There was a little quiver in Mike's voice, for to his ear had come from far across the river a muffled, indistinct tramping. Was it cattle, coming down to drink?—No, a horse whickered softly, and Mike's heart surged. Undoubtedly, an armed force was advancing upon the ford.

The presence of the other force was further betrayed by the increased number of birds which, obviously alarmed, circled through the gray skies overhead, uttering frightened cries. Soon the dull, indistinct sounds commenced

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to become distinguishable. A horse snuffled, a bit jangled; somewhere a man tripped, fell and cursed when his rifle clattered among the stones on the invisible further shore. Otherwise, the stillness of impending doom ruled over the ford.

Mike realized that sweat was standing out on the backs of his hands; he could feel it prickle. Andy, too, was a great believer in early attacks. Were his brother's blue-clad légionnaires creeping down to the ford, along with their mounted Mexican allies?

He strained his eyes at the writhing, fleecy mist which clung tenaciously to the swift dark water of the river, as though loath to move away. A guarded voice was heard, but in what language it spoke Mike could in no wise tell, from his vantage point among the water smoothed bowlders.

He glanced sidewise, to glimpse the dark-faced Republican riflemen craning their necks where they crouched behind stones. They were pulling cartridges from their boxes and laying them conveniently to hand on the earth. Spurr, busy on his inevitable cud of "chawing," lay comfortably sprawled out on a flat rock fiddling with the sights of the Winchester which in his hands was as deadly as the thunderbolts of an Olympian god. Young Escandón, too, was feeling the strain. His lips kept moving, and he raised a dark green cuff to wipe away the sweat which had gathered on his well-shaped forehead.

Soon the noises grew very loud. Pebbles clicked against each other, and all at once Mike made out an indistinct black mass of mingled horsemen and infantry, pouring down over the other bank. One after another, the horses stiffened their front legs, and slid down to that sandy beach in a cloud of dust and gravel, their riders leaning back in their saddles and balancing themselves with their carbines.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Hot Ice

ANY ONE who burned himself by touching a piece of ice would have reason to be surprised, yet hot ice was one of the queer results obtained by Professor P. W. Bridgman of Harvard a number of years ago when studying the behavior of different materials under extremely high pressures. In his apparatus he used pressures up to 200,000 and 300,000 pounds per square inch and sometimes higher.

Since these pressures are several times greater than those in heavy, long-range guns, the apparatus was set up behind boiler plate as a precaution. When subjected to pressure, ice behaved rather queerly. At first its melting point fell to lower and lower temperatures until at 30,000 pounds per square inch it melted at four degrees below zero. At higher pressures the ice changed to denser forms that remained solid until much higher temperatures were reached. Thus, at a pressure of 300,000 pounds, the ice inside the steel pressure cylinder remained solid up to about 180 degrees Fahrenheit. This is still ice, yet it is quite hot enough to give a bad burn if one were able to touch it.

John H. Spicer.

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Titans of the North

By GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

That bomb Ross Ames tried to intercept on a far Northern island was to splatter molten seeds of hatred and start a fierce lumber war

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

TREACHERY.

THAT was a night to make any sensible man want to hug the stove in the lumberjacks' bunk house; a night of gale and sleet and driving rain, such as only that far northern island of Temouskami could produce.

"Just my confounded luck to be on shift at the loading-towers to-night!" thought Ross Ames as, head bent and fists jammed into the pockets of his heavy oilskins, he plodded down the long pier. Despite turned up collar and hunched shoulders, the storm cut him like a whip. Now or then in the darkness he stumbled over railroad ties. "A devil of a night!"

Hungry waves bombarded the pier from the great river, flinging spindrift clean over into the retaining basin. In that basin a sullen grinding of logs told that heavy swells were running even there. The pressure on the main boom that, anchored to immense cribs across the basin mouth, held all these half-million cords of pulpwood, must have been incalculable. Five million dollars worth of wood, held in leash only by a boom!

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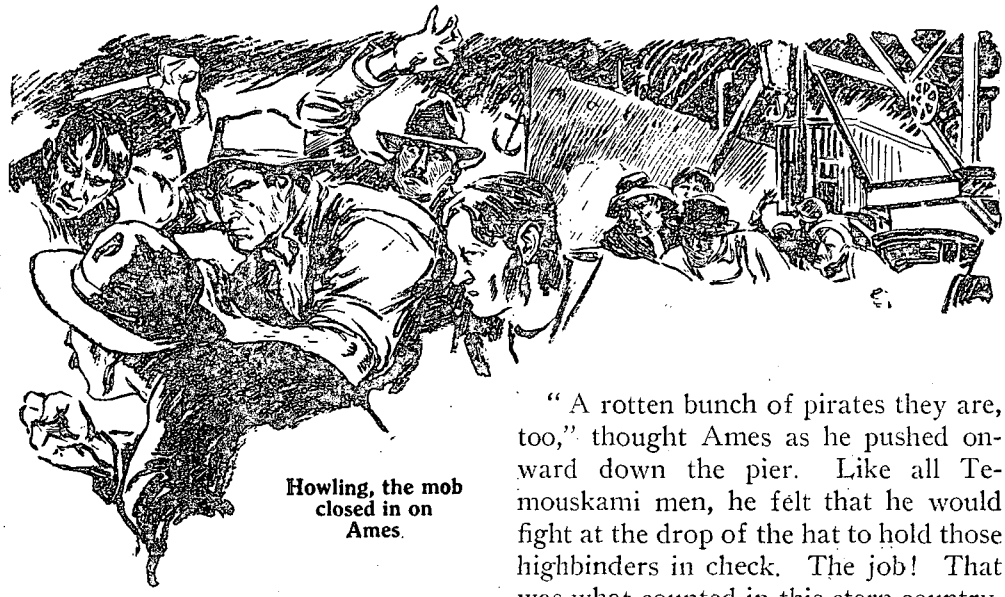

Howling, the mob closed in on Ames.

Even though Ames was nothing but a crane-man with a job at Tower Number Two, he gave this problem serious thought. For his job—didn't it depend on the boom's holding? If that broke loose, not only would the Temouskami Corporation slump to ruin, but Ames's job would vanish along with it.

"It'd go to hell, that's where," he growled. "I sure hope nothing busts to-night!"

There would be those, however, who would welcome disaster. The North Bay Lumber Company, over on the mainland—how they would rejoice if ruin overtook the Temouskami Corporation! Coming downriver to Temouskami Island, Ames had heard much talk—part of it loose, but some of it shrewdly specific—about the bitter rivalry between those two titanic lumber companies of the Northland.

Anything that might cripple Temouskami or wreck it, keep it from filling its contracts, would help the North Bay people gain control of it.

"A rotten bunch of pirates they are, too," thought Ames as he pushed onward down the pier. Like all Temouskami men, he felt that he would fight at the drop of the hat to hold those highbinders in check. The job! That was what counted in this stern country. And the job meant keeping Temouskami on top! He would do his share to keep it there.

Wet glimmers of incandescents, on rough poles, cast fireflecks along steel of the pier railroad. At the far end of the three-thousand-foot jetty clusters of floodlights showed where, despite rain and hail and tempest, the giant towers still were loading, ever loading the hungry ships that always yawned for more.

"Pulpwood!" those ships seemed to cry. "Feed us more pulpwood, and keep feeding! Remember the contract—and sweat, ye slaves, to fill our bellies!"

That contract, yes, that Gordon-Porter contract, must be filled. The job must be done! Before the freeze-up, all those hundreds of thousands of cords must be stowed in the hungry ships and rushed upriver, ahead of the ice.

Once that contract was filled, Temouskami could breathe easy once more. It could meet its obligations, survive till the spring thaw, till shipments

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could begin again. But were anything now to slip—disaster!

Ames was thinking a bit vaguely of all this as he slogged along, head down, shoulders pushing the storm. Even he, only an atom in this vast complex of whirling activities on the island, even he had his part to play.

What a gruelling hike! But after a regular battle against that gale, Ames reached the pierhead. And as with yellow oilskins whipped and drenched, he thrust in under the glare of the floodlights, he paused a moment before starting to climb the lofty iron ladder that clung spiderweb-like to the flank of his tower.

At the pier-side, two of those pulpwood-ship dragons of voracity loomed, gigantic bulks of sheer, blind hunger in the night. Swarms of men, aboard them—Lilliputians striving to feed insatiable Gullivers—were laboring with peavies and "picaroons" as they stowed cargo.

Fantastic shadows leaped, quivered, as the immense loading buckets far aloft swung and dumped and once more whirled up in black, tumultuous night. Those buckets were grotesque hands of Titans that clutched, that hurled and menaced in that shouting dark.

"Lord, what a picture!" thought the American. He had seen all this no end of times; but somehow, on this wild night, it struck him with smashing force. Man, pitted against a tremendous obligation. Man, bucking the universe!

Ames still had five minutes before going on duty. And so he stayed there, fascinated and thrilled. Sheltered a little by a tool shed, he watched those Titans striving. Across the pier, the concentrating basin lay brimmed with formless pools of blackness, save where the floodlights spotted that dark with raw blotches. There the untiring jack-ladders were steadily chanting their montonous hymn of labor—

"*Ra*-cha-cha-cha. *Ra*-cha-cha-cha!"

So sounded the cacophony of chains and ratchets, as with untiring force, electrically driven, they brought up the pulpwood logs. Those logs, huddled along like driven sheep, were tumbling into the jet black inclosure, slewing down from the tops of the conveyors in weaving torments of confusion.

Vaguely glimpsed figures of men, striving there, seemed only puppets in this mighty drama of King Spruce.

The towers—center and focal point of the whole island's feverish industry—dominated everything. They dwarfed all else with their colossal might; loomed up like monsters of some fabulous and prehistoric world, sturdy on their stupendous metal legs, and with heads of steel that clove the low driven scud.

From their boiler rooms, high in air, blood-red gushes of light shot against mist and steam as furnace doors swung wide; then swiftly faded.

A rumble, a roaring and shuddering tumult filled that far northern night. Steel, fire and steam, constrained to do the bidding of man, their master, all joined in one gigantic symphony of striving.

AS Ames watched, all at once he grew conscious of a figure that clambered up one of the rough wooden ladders from an electric winch caisson to the pier. This figure, barrel chested and misshapen, stood a moment squinting up at the towers.

"Why, that's Marcotte," thought Ames. He had recognized a surly and ill-tempered lumber boss, a fellow he had more than once had words with at the bunk house; as ugly a brute as you

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could find in all the Northland. Tough, huge-shouldered and bandy-legged, the Frenchman looked a sort of misbegotten Hercules. "What the devil's Marcotte doing out here, to-night? *He* don't work on the pier!".

Yet after all, might he not have been sent out here on some special job or other? Surely he might—but for all that, Ames kept an eye on him. Something queer about this, maybe.

Ames shrank back, watching, deeper into the shadow of the tool shed. Now he saw Marcotte was carrying a dinner-pail. Well, that was all right. Certainly Marcotte must have a job, out here.

With a landward glance up the pier, as if expecting something, the lumber boss advanced toward the towers. The man had a game leg; he limped slightly as he came, half-seen, over railroad tracks, then skirted some piles of lumber and kept steadily on through gale and rain.

Now he was coming down the western side of the pier, away from the pulp-steamers at the other stringpiece. Nobody gave him any heed. Just a foreman with a dinner-bucket; well—?

The limping Frenchman paused a moment, raised his left hand.

Complete and crushing darkness fell. Every light along the pier blacked out.

Shouts began to echo: "Lights! Lights! Hey, there, what the hell? Give us some lights, here!"

Ames half-sensed the outlines of a creeping shadow just a trifle blacker than the all-enveloping gloom. This shadow drew near Tower Number Two, paused, retreated. With straining eyes, Ames dimly followed it.

"Something damned strange about all this!"

Aboard one of the pulp-steamers an electric flash light wavered with uncertain beam. The retreating figure crossed this light-ray as it swept across the ship's rail. Ames saw the figure no longer held its dinner-bucket.

This perception was just a flicker of time, but in that flicker Ames sensed deadly peril. It galvanized him to action; flung him forward in a staggering run toward the tower.

Against rain-drive and wind, stumbling over ties and ironwork, he ran. That dinner-pail! He must find it!

Yells for "Lights! Lights!" kept flaring away on the gale. Two or three more electric torches began to weave their patterns. As Ames reached the tower base, at a point where one of the gigantic steel legs rested on its trackway, a vagrant light-beam picked the dinner-pail out of darkness.

"There, by God!"

Immediately Ames knew this was no ordinary pail. Tin pails full of lumbermen's grub and bottled coffee do not emit a faint *tick-tack-tick,* like an alarm clock swaddled in cotton batting.

For a moment, stunned out of all action, Ames stood there holding the pail.

Suddenly from inside it he heard a faint, ominous and premonitory click.

"Holy Lord!" he stammered. "It's a bomb!"

CHAPTER II.

PRISON BARS.

ROSS AMES'S first impulse was to set the bomb down; run for dear life. His second was to hurl the infernal thing away. But where?

Off the east side of the pier, it would blow a hole in one of the steamers, sink her where she lay. Not there! On the other side, only logs and the cribwork of the concentrating basin would be smashed.

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So toward the basin he turned, stumbling over rails. He almost fell—caught himself, ran ahead.

Down the pier a voice roared—

"Hey, you! What the hell you doin' there?"

The American ran on. His scalp crawled, his lips felt parched. Plunging headlong to the margin of the basin, he slung the bomb. It flickered dimly, gyrated in a wide arc, struck the logs—

Night yawned crimson. A blinding sheet of flame leaped aloft, mingled with flying débris, with cascades of swift spray.

A monstrous concussion deafened Ames. It stunned, flung him back crumpled against a pile of timbers. With metallic clangors it rocked the towers. Air whirled full of whistling fragments. Down slashed a rain of broken logs, wreckage, twisted iron.

Wild yells echoed along the dark pier, from ships towers, jack-ladders. Angry and frightened men, like hornets aswarm, came bearing down on Ames. Lanterns and flash lights danced.

"What the hell?" "*Sacré cochon!*" "Who done that?" "Where's the man as t'rowed that bomb?" "*Sacré nom de Dieu!*"

Ames dragged himself up and stood there panting, staring, as he swayed against a beam. His oilskins were half torn off, sou'wester gone. Under dishevelled wet hair he felt a warm trickle. The hand with which he smeared his forehead came away crimson.

He tried to stammer something. Only hoarse gasps escaped his lips, salt with blood. Niagara seemed thundering in his ears. His brain whirled sickly.

Through that whirling he dimly saw furious enemies closing in, vague and unreal by lantern gleams that wavered in slashing rain. He heard curses, revilings, howls of rage and execration.

Then, emerging from that nightmare, he vaguely glimpsed a face he knew—Marcotte's! A face with massive jaw, narrow and vindictive eyes. He saw knotted fists, as Marcotte led the attack.

"Dere he is, ba gar!" roared the lumber boss. "De damn American dynamite t'rower!"

"You—you're a rotten liar!" Ames rallied. "You planted it—yourself! I only picked it up and threw it—"

"Hear dat?" the Canuck bellowed. "He admit it! He—"

"But it was *you* that planted it under the tower!"

"Ah, hell!" the lumber boss snarled. The light of half a dozen lanterns glimmered on brutal faces, shaggy beards, teeth glinting with wolfish hate and rage.

AT bay against the lumber pile, Ames could only gasp, make futile gestures.

"Tryin' to smash de main boom!" roared a jack, brandishing a peavey. "Leave all de pulpwood go adrift—take all our jobs!"

"Listen, men! Somebody cut the lights," Ames still vainly tried to explain. "And when the lights were off, this skunk here—this Marcotte—"

"Skunk, *you*'self!" the lumber boss howled. His face was a demon's. Under a round knit cap, his forehead slanted sharply back. His left ear had been half torn off, nose flattened in some battle of his tempestuous career. Now his mighty fist shook under Ames's nose. "Skunk, an' worse dan any skunk! Ye're a North Bay spy—dat's w'at!"

The accusation of being a spy for

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the North Bay Lumber Company, hated rival of the Temouskami, was the most damning possible to fling. Howls of rage leaped from the fast thickening mob.

"Kill him." "Slug him!" "Lynch him—lynch the North Bay spy!"

Marcotte, his face distorted with hate, drove a smashing right hander at Ames's jaw. The American's blood stained head snapped back. Catapulted over a timber, he landed sprawling. Crimson passion that kills flamed in him.

"Atta boy!" "Finish him off!" "Lynch the—!"

But already Ames was up again, hot for slaughter.

"Come on, you lousy French dynamiter!" he shouted.

As he lunged to the attack, a glint of steel flicked in the Canuck's fist. That knife blade would have finished Ames, had not a peavey, swung by a lumberjack, got to him first.

The peavey landed just below his right ear. Lights danced. Flashes, pinwheels, shooting stars mingled with the most gorgeous rockets.

Ames tried to rally, but his insides caved away. Both hands shot out as he pitched forward.

Darkness closed kind veils.

The universe rolled round, a few millenniums, and Ross Ames struggled up to the consciousness that his head was bandaged, his neck stiff and sore, every bone aching. A cosmic thirst had turned his mouth to dust and ashes.

He also perceived that he was lying on an extremely hard bed, and that a glimmer of light revealed iron bars, criss-crossed over a dim window.

"What the hell, now?"

Then he faded out again.

Later, he found himself blinking and puzzled. Some kind of coherence returned. Well anyhow, the loading tower had been saved. And he had saved it. Yes, but then—why should he be in a lockup? It all seemed very queer.

After a while he wanted a smoke, and managed to drag himself up to a sitting posture on his bed. Yes, he was in a cell, right enough. And his pipe, tobacco and matches were all missing. His knife, too. Every pocket had been thoroughly frisked. Somebody had taken away his torn oilskins. All he now had was his Mackinaw, his wet clothes and boots.

"Damnation!"

As fuller consciousness dawned, his anger grew. Ames was like that. A scrapper, his first reaction was likely to be rage. He felt of his swathed head, that still seemed spinning. Why the blazes should he be in jail?

"That's all you get for saving a corporation's property! To hell with such swine!"

Then he remembered Marcotte, and his sore fists clenched.

"Damn you! Wait till I get out o' this!"

THE only thing Ames wanted now was to get out. The rest of the program — well, he'd arrange that to his own satisfaction.

Lust for action, for battle and revenge spurred him to his feet. Staggering, he reached the iron barred door of his cell, through which a dim light was faintly visible. He shook this door savagely, till it rattled again. Gustily he bellowed:

"Hey, hello there! Somebody—*hello!*"

A step sounded and a figure appeared, demanding:

"What's the matther o' ye, in there?"

Ames recognized the island con-

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stable, a fellow named Buck O'Hara. Not a bad scout, just a pig-headed Galway Irishman, with the brains of a cockroach.

Right now, O'Hara was jubilant. He felt this night's work had been a good one for all hands—except his prisoner. O'Hara himself might benefit by it. Not often could he enjoy the distinction of playing host to a spy and bomb thrower.

"Hello there, O'Hara!" Ames hailed the officer. Now he had forgotten all about being thirsty and wanting a smoke. More urgent matters were on his mind. "What the devil's all this about, anyhow? What am I in the jug for?"

O'Hara surveyed his prisoner in silence for a minute; silence through which the moaning of the gale, outside, made itself audible; the whish of driven rain against the cell window.

"What are ye in fer, is it?" asked the Irishman. "Why, fer safe-keepin', o' course, till ye can be handed the prize in the marnin'."

"Prize? What prize?"

"Ye'll soon be afther findin' out, then." And O'Hara grinned. A tall, red-faced fellow, he looked particularly elated. "But listen, now. No matther what ye say, it'll be used aginst ye. So be quiet, American, afore I give ye the rough side o' me tongue. We ain't got much use here, fer North Bay spies an' dynamiters that's paid to put us out o' business."

"You're a damned liar!" flared Ames. "All I did was pick up the bomb that was planted by Marcotte!"

"Ah, tell it to the magistrate in the marnin'!"

"You mean I'm going to be held for trial?"

"An' what else, then? An' if ye're found as guilty as we know ye are, me fine buckaroo, ye'll be deported to Rivière du Chien. We not havin' no permanent jail here."

"Permanent jail?" Ames retorted, his anger dissolving into a vast dismay. He clutched the grillework of the cell door with tensing fingers. "Say! You don't mean—?"

"An' why not? Ye ain't in the U. S. A., now, where they pins bookays on gangsters. Ye're in Canada, where there's law an' order. 'Tain't no joke, up here, to be dynamitin' property an' endangerin' life by the wholesale. Ye're lucky to be alive, that's what ye are, then. An' five to fifteen years in clink, at hard labor, is what ye stand to get, me b'y!"

STRUCK dumb by this appalling news, the American could only stare and gasp. He peered at the exultant constable. But finally, rallying a bit, he said:

"I tell you, all I did was pick up the bomb! Somebody cut the light wires, at a signal from Marcotte. Then Marcotte planted the dynamite. I saw him! Hang it all, I *saw* him!"

"Sure ye did," mocked O'Hara.

"I saved the tower, the whole damned business for this company. And now—"

"Faith, then, Magistrate Saulnier will believe ye, somethin' grand," the Irishman made sport of Ames. "Wid ahl the witnesses we got aginst ye, it will be gold medals we'll be afther pinnin' on y'r chist!"

"Why, damn you!" burst out Ames, beginning to see red again. "I'll show *you*, before I'm through with this! How long do I have to rot in this hell-hole? When do I get my hearing?"

"In the marnin', like I already told ye. Till then, me laddybuck, ye betther be good!"

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With which advice O'Hara retreated from the cell door, leaving Ames alone to enraged and bitter broodings.

Even now the American could not but believe the preposterous charge might stick, and that many witnesses might swear him to destruction. As a reward for having risked his life in what he now dimly sensed as some kind of monstrous plot, prison doors might close on him for many a weary year. The thing seemed too fantastic—yet it was true!

Exhausted, suffering, Ames flung himself down on the hard bed and tried to sleep. His thirst was parching, but not for that would he beg any favors now of that jubilant Irishman. He'd die first!

He tried to sleep. Only fevered insomnia was his. But at very long last, consciousness grew blurred, blent with the wind-moaning, the rain-slash on the window.

The American rolled on his right side, pillowed his battered head on an aching arm, and drifted into troubled, nightmare-ridden slumber.

CHAPTER III.

RAILROADED.

COURT was colorful with lumberjacks and clerks, surveyors and engineers, laborers and all kinds of North-country men variously picturesque in brilliant hued Mackinaws, khaki and corduroy, leather coats and leggings and high boots. The proceedings took place in a barren room of the administration building, with Magistrate Saulnier—who unfortunately spoke very little English—in charge. This in itself militated against Ames, whose French was practically nil.

Witnesses simply swarmed, against the American. Chief among them was Marcotte, a grin on his fishlike mouth with its thick, cruel lips disclosing broken snags of teeth—as brutal a figure of a slave driving lumber boss as ever lorded it over a gang of "sprucers." Marcotte's voluminous testimony thoroughly clinched matters, sealed the American's fate.

Through all his rage and anguish, Ames acutely sensed the exultation of these hostile folk. One figure, beside Marcotte, stood out above the others; the figure of a lumberjack that, in the bunk house, Ames had known as Jean Durand.

Durand took no part in the proceedings, but only sat among the ruck of spectators and watched and listened, and held his peace. Yet for all Durand's silence, Ames felt a certain stress and strain of special hostility in the man's look. You would have thought the webs of damnation, weaving about Ames's helplessness, brought some inexplicable but potent satisfaction to this lumberjack.

"Why the devil should he hate *me*, especially?" Ames found the wonder in his mind, as the case wound him ever tighter, like a fly caught in a spider's silken death. "I never did anything to that bird, so far as I know—except leave him alone, for the surly hound he is!"

A surly customer and a queer one indeed, this Durand. His age might have been forty. Broad cheek bones, saturnine eyes darkly arrogant, a piratical black beard, and a missing joint from the left index finger all combined to make him a figure not easy to forget.

Observing every move in the trial, watching with the intent fixity of a spider itself, now Durand seemed to brood like an evil genius over the pro-

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ceedings. But after all, in this veritable sea of hatred, one wave more or less—what could it matter?

The thing that most deeply cut Ames was the attitude of the girl who served as court stenographer. Eve Hilliard, her name was. Secretary to Island Manager Lenoir, now she was recording this trial. Why need she look so indifferent, even though not hostile? Why seem to ignore the fact that she and he knew each other fairly well?

"That's a woman all over for you!" Ames bitterly pondered. "You're all right, with women, as long as you *are* all right. But when you're down on your luck, they don't even know you are alive. To hell with such friendship!"

YES, Eve Hilliard and he had been something like friends, in a rather distant way, until this catastrophe had smitten him. She had come down river with him on the island supply-boat, Alouette. During the journey they had had a few talks, a bit of a stroll or two around the deck. When they had landed, Ames had helped her with her baggage.

Since having been on the island, these two months past, Eve had walked out a few times with him, during some of his off hours. They'd even once gone trout fishing together. Never 'd been any nonsense between them, though. Just what had seemed like a frank and honest friendship.

Yet now—now Eve didn't even seem to know he existed. She had never so much as a glance, let alone an encouraging smile, for him.

"Damn her, she's afraid to even let people see she knows me, now!" brooded Ames, as he watched the girl efficiently taking her shorthand notes of some particularly damaging evidence given in Canuck patois by a picaroon man. "Now that I'm in a jam, she'd see me hung and never raise a finger to help me!"

It seemed to him some connection existed between her and the saturnine Durand. But in his confused state of mind, he couldn't figure out just what that connection might be; couldn't for the moment quite place it. All he could sense was a keen dislike of her.

Suddenly a thin wedge of illumination penetrated his brain. He sat there, bruised and bandaged and helpless, trying to knit up some elusive picture that ever kept dissolving. Ah, now he remembered!

"I've got it!" exultantly he thought. "Got something, anyhow!"

Vividly there flashed to him an episode that had taken place just Sunday before last. This girl and he were coming in from that trout fishing jaunt. They were returning to Port Murchison, the island's principal settlement, from their excursion out to Three Mile Brook. Ames could see her again, as she had been that day, alone with him, out on that road through the virgin Northland forest.

He forgot his physical hurts, his mental torments, the deadly peril of his position, as a picture unrolled to his mental eye. Once more it seemed as if Eve Hilliard were standing there before him—a trimly alert figure in high boots and khaki knickers, with a plaid Mackinaw, her bright rebellious hair partly confined by a blue béret.

The sunlight, through spruce and fir boughs, made golden glints in her eyes. It certainly got tangled in her hair, too; brought out lovely colors in her hair, as she and Ames with well filled baskets of trout hiked amicably along the forest road to town.

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A happy hour, that! On every hand, dark wilderness expanses faded into cool shadows as day declined. A waiting stillness surrounded them. The pointed spires of the conifers seemed peeping at these little human creatures —creatures that, in the mass, were Titans who yet would conquer this primitive, untrodden Kingdom of the Wild.

ALL at once Eve and the American had seen a couple of men come out of an obscure wood-road and glance each way. Perceiving the girl and Ames, they hesitated a moment, then plunged into a road that crossed over into the forest, and disappeared. But not before Ames had recognized Marcotte.

And the other man?

"That's funny," said Eve, a little pucker of wonderment drawn between her eye—her clear-dark eyes that saw so much and saw so steadily. "That's certainly odd."

"What's odd?"

"Why that Durand fellow should be with Marcotte. They're not on the same kind of work, or on any gangs together. And they certainly haven't anything in common, so far as being friends might count."

"Was that other fellow Durand?" asked Ames, walking along beside Eve.

"Certainly. Didn't you see him?"

"I didn't notice, particularly. A lumberjack's just a lumberjack, 'specially out here in the woods. What do you mean, those two not having anything in common?"

"I mean they haven't, if Durand is who I think he is," she explained.

"And who's that?"

"Well, *I* believe his real name is Henri Archambauld. I've had a good look at him once or twice, and I don't think I can be mistaken. Even though he's grown a beard and gone to work as a jack, I'd bet my last nickel I still recognize him."

"That's all Greek to me," said Ames. "Who the deuce is this Archambauld you're talking about?"

"Well," Eve answered, with some reluctance, "he's a man I used to know, back in Montreal. I've even played golf with him and been to at least one house party with him. I—I didn't know any better, those days. And why he should be lumberjacking here on Temouskami, now, gets me!"

"Maybe he's here to learn the lumber business," suggested Ames, "just like I am."

"As if Henri Archambauld needed to learn the lumber business. Why, he's been at it years and years."

"Perhaps he's here for his health?"

"Health! That brute's never had a sick day in all his life, more's the pity!"

"Needs the dough, then, like me?"

"Likely, eh? With more than half a million invested in different lumber companies."

"Well, it's past *me,* then. I give it up!"

They both gave it up, and once more fell to talking of pleasanter things, as at a good round pace they swung along the forest road toward the primitive little settlement of Port Murchison.

THAT had been that; but now, sitting there in the hostile court room, with the peril of a crushing prison sentence hanging over him, Ames was beginning to piece fragments together, as in a cut-out puzzle. He was beginning to find various pieces match up, make a kind of pattern.

Vague, distorted and obscure, none the less some pattern existed, and he could see it—almost.

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Marcotte and Archambauld together, as acquaintances or even friends; their appearance of not wanting to be seen together; Archambauld with big lumber investments — perhaps in the North Bay Company—and posing as a lumberjack. Marcotte planting a bomb to cripple the Temouskami enterprise—well, how did it all work out?

"There's something in all this—something I've got to dig into!"

Easy enough to say that. But how to do that? He, a prisoner and alone, friendless, the underdog in a snarling confusion of hate and lies and passionate lusting for revenge!

And now, words were reaching him. Now the last witness had been dismissed. The magistrate was looking at him, speaking to him. Quite obviously judgment was being passed. With perfect clarity, Ames saw that his own story of what had happened had gained no credence. This judgment was adverse, was damning.

The old Frenchman's voice seemed coming from a million miles away, as with a broken accent he pronounced:

"Ze present court find sufficient evidence to 'old ze defendant, wizout bail, for ze Superior Court. Remanded for trial at Laurier, durin' ze next session."

Enthusiastic applause burst out; applause that old Saulnier could not quell. Nor did he try over-hard to quell it! Chairs scraped. Lumberjacks and surveyors and everybody got up. Eve Hilliard seemed to disappear, swallowed up in the turmoil. Marcotte and Durand jostled out, with the crowd. Ames realized everything was all over. Held for the Superior Court! If he hadn't been able to clear himself here, what chance would he have there?

A kind of crimson mist surged across his world. He leaped up, waving wild arms, shouting:

"It's a damned lie! I'm being framed—I've been framed! Marcotte did it, I tell you—the lousy—"

"Here, ye! None o' that!"

It was Buck O'Hara's voice. O'Hara had him by the arm, was shaking him.

"Cut that out, ye spalpeen of an American, afore I give ye a taste o' me billy! Come on along wid ye, now, back to y'r cell! An'—"

Ames smote the words from the Irishman's mouth; wiped them out with blood, that stained his fist. Dumb-mad, for the moment completely loco, he hurled himself into berserk frenzy of combat.

Futile, worse than useless, it ended with a crack of a police billy on his bandaged skull.

An all-enveloping blackness, kinder far than the light of that cruel northern day, enveloped him as he fell.

CHAPTER IV.

EVE BEARS A HAND.

NOW that the steam roller of island "justice" had trundled over the American and apparently crushed him flat, Temouskami washed its hands of the whole affair and resumed its customary routine of labor.

The island felt relief that so brawling a public enemy—a North Bay spy and dynamiter, a fighter, a swashbuckler who had even attacked the constable in open court—was now safely under lock and key, waiting for the next up river boat to deport him.

"Lucky he didn't blow the whole island to hell, and butcher us all in our bunks," might have summed up the consensus of opinion. "To say nothing of putting us all out of jobs and leaving us to starve this winter!"

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Men have been lynched for less than Temouskami blamed on the American.

But, the danger past, Temouskami quieted down, went about its usual business as before. A few hours' work sufficed to repair all trifling damage at the concentrating basin, where Marcotte's bomb had exploded. Temouskami thanked whatever stars it had faith in that neither of the loading towers had been crippled. For this might have stopped the filling of the Gordon-Porter contract, brought the whole enterprise crashing down in ruin.

And Temouskami, whose real god was toil, rejoiced that toil remained to it.

The next day after the trial, Ames got the surprise of his life. For Eve Hilliard called at the little jail to see him.

He was sitting in a blue haze of misery on his bed, smoking the pipe that had been restored to him, and wondering how the devil he was ever going to get out of the hell that now imminently yawned before him, when Buck O'Hara appeared at the cell door.

"Lady to see you, ye murtherin' ruffian!" the Irishman thickly announced. He spoke uncertainly, by reason of a cut, swollen lip and a lost tooth—souvenirs of the American's handiwork. "An' sure, if 'twas the hangman comin' to fetch ye, I'd be a dom sight happier! Ye need one, bad."

"What you need is a nurse, to keep you from losing your teeth and your beauty, such as you've got—which isn't much," Ames retorted. "Show the visitor in, and yourself out, and make it snappy!"

"Sure, 'tis no lady as 'll be let in no cell, wid the likes o' yeez! She can stand at the door, an'—"

"Come on now, O'Hara, stop that nonsense!" cut in a feminine voice, and Eve Hilliard appeared at the door beside the Galway constable. "Open this door, get me a chair, and look alive, or Island Manager Lenoir may hear a thing or two about—well, you know what about!"

"Beg pardon, miss!" the Irishman wilted. "Sure, no harm meant, but I was only thryin' to pertect ye from—"

"That 'll do!" she crisply interrupted. "When you've got that chair, you can go."

Buck O'Hara got the chair, put it into the cell for her and discreetly withdrew. Certain matters as to dealings with game poachers at Les Éboulements had left him vulnerable. When a man isn't certain just how much a woman knows, he's out of luck.

AMES eyed his visitor with suspicion as he stood up and took the pipe from his unshaven lips. Rather a ruffian he looked, in that dim light. His clothes were wrinkled and awry, reddish hair all rucked up between his bandages. By contrast with the girl's trim neatness he seemed a vagabond, a wastrel fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils.

Eve Hilliard, in a green leather jacket, short skirt and high boots, with her hair tucked under a béret and her dark eyes half-serious, half-smiling, should have brought a ray of sunshine into that dank cell. But all she brought, for Ames, was bitter resentment and suspicion.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me why you've come?" he played an inquiring gambit.

"To help you, if I can," she answered, sitting down. She produced her cigarette case, chose a "Turret," and accepted a light. "Let's get at the inwardness of this situation."

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He sat down and glowered at her, sucking his pipe to life. Suspicion tensed his big shoulders, made his eyes wary. Not thus was any Temouskami spy to win from him any confidences that might be twisted against him for his still further damage.

"I don't think there's anything more to get at," he returned. "I've been framed and railroaded; and you—you sat right there in court and listened to it all, and never so much as gave me a look of human recognition or encouragement!"

"I don't blame you for being sore, Mr. Ames. But perhaps you wouldn't be quite so sore if you understood."

"Oh, I understand, all right! A fellow might as well look for wool in a goat's house, as for justice on this island!"

"It's tough, yes, I admit it," the girl assented. "But what could I do? In court, there, I couldn't show you any encouragement. I wanted to keep track of everything, in an impersonal way. Especially Marcotte and the man who calls himself Durand—"

"What d'you mean by that?" Eagerly he leaned forward on his cot. "You think they—those two—"

"Not so loud," she cautioned. "Even a worried Irishman may eavesdrop. Yes, more than ever I think there's something between those two Frenchmen. They're as different as black and white, in one way—socially and financially, I mean. But in another way, they're brothers under their skins. Both 'Jack Canucks.' And I wouldn't put it past them, to—well—"

"Well, what?"

Judicially she blew smoke, that mingled with his. She eyed that smoke, and her words fell slowly:

"Here's how it looks to me, Mr. Ames. Those two may be in league together, to damage this corporation and throw it into bankruptcy, so that the North Bay Company can get control of it. Mind, I don't say it is so, but it may be. Assuming that it is, you seem to have got in the way of something, and to have been made what you Americans call the 'fall guy.' And that being the case—"

"Certainly it's the case!" Ames asserted. "I've got that doped out, already. But what good does it do? Who's going to listen to me?"

"Nobody, apparently. But somebody 'll listen to me—if it's so!"

"You? You're going to start something?"

"I don't know, Mr. Ames. I can't promise anything. But this I can promise you—I'm going to do a little private investigating, and find out what I can. Then, if—"

"You've got to do it mighty quick!" the American exclaimed. "Next boat out o' here, I'm deported to Laurier, for trial. And after that—after all the evidence is cold, why—"

"Yes, I know I've got to work fast," she nodded. "And I can't promise anything. Not a thing, Mr. Ames. So don't build up any false hopes. I only wanted to come and tell you that you've got at least one friend here on this island. That there's at least one person who believes in you, and who knows perfectly well *you* never planted that bomb. Perhaps that 'll help some, eh?"

She glanced at her wrist watch, stood up, held out her hand.

"Help? It 'll drag me back from hell!" Ames fervently ejaculated, grasping her hand. "Whether I bump the bumps or not, I—I'll never forget—what you—"

"Never mind saying it," she laughed, drawing her hand away. "I

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must be going now, really. Remember!" She laid a finger on her lips. "You'll hear from me, surely, before the boat leaves."

"I can count on that, definitely?"

"Definitely! But don't get your hopes up, too high. After all, Marcotte and Durand are two men—hard, ruthless men. And I'm only a girl. So don't expect miracles."

"Miss Hilliard—Eve—how can I ever—?"

"Please don't try. And now, good luck. Good-by!"

IGNORANT of the new hope born in the American, indifferent to his fate—save to hope it might be bitter—the island community went ahead with its labor, rejoicing that it had labor to do.

Vast activities continued, day by day, as Ames still lay in jail waiting for the boat, that had been delayed by engine-trouble; waiting, hoping for some news from Eve, that never came.

New hands, other hands than those of Rossiter Ames, now controlled Tower Number Two. Another man than he was now master of all that rumble and tumult, of those buckets that plunged into the basin; those buckets that snatched up cords of logs, swung across, dumped the logs into those waiting ships so far below.

Everything reeked with Niagaras of sluicing water.

The whole island was fevered with strivings to beat King Winter before he should lock up the river with his icy key. And thus the labor of those Titans—Titans of steel and flame, Titans of muscle, bone and sinew, went on and ever on.

How vast a symphony of toil! Toil, bent on just getting out the contract, making good!

If nothing happened now, these swarming men who had risked so much on their great gamble with the North could richly succeed. Yes—if nothing happened!

News came by radio from "Poste CKAC, La Presse, à Montréal," on the sixth day after Ames had been crammed into the island jail, that the supply boat had at last been repaired and would arrive to-morrow from Rivière du Chien.

"And still no news from Eve Hilliard," bitterly pondered the American. "Still no help from her. She must be the bunk, too, just like everything else up here in this forsaken country!" He felt himself lost. Felt that he'd been a fool, in the first place, to leave a good enough engineering job in North Adams to trek up into such a wilderness just to learn the lumber business—

"And land in hell!" he added.

Then, right in the midst of his bitterest cogitations, something happened—something that shifted the whole picture.

CHAPTER V.

OUT AND AWAY!

THIS something was the arrival of a visitor, a stranger he'd never laid eyes on before.

"Somebody to see ye," growled Buck O'Hara, letting a man into the cell. "He can stay half an hour—if ye're good."

"You go to hell, and stay there!" the stranger flung at O'Hara. "I'm a Swede, an' don't you forget it, you mick. An' any time you want to see who's the best man—not as cop an' fire-boss—but as man to man, I'm your huckleberry! Now then, hello, fella!" he added to Ames, who had got up

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from the hard bed where he had been lying and smoking. "Who the devil's grandmother are you, anyhow, an' what's all this about?"

Ames inspected him, by that vague light, before making any answer. The American had grown cagey by now; suspicious of everybody, and ugly as a bear with a sore head. So he just stood there in his cell, studying this raw-boned, stocky and blue-eyed Scandinavian who was clad in a rough Mackinaw colored like Joseph's polychromatic coat.

"Well, who are *you?*" Ames countered. "And what d'you want? You aren't a lawyer, by any chance?"

"Lawyer? Hell, no! My name's Enemark. Pete Enemark. They all call me Dutchy. I'm fire-boss o' the west district, with headquarters at Chantilly Farm. Heard there was a white man in trouble, here. A Canuck I wouldn't have bothered about. But a white man's different. So I thought I'd hike in an' see about it. What you been doin', fella?"

"Me? Stupidest thing in the world. Trying to save the property of a corporation."

"They sure pinned the bee on you, my boy!"

"Don't I know it? Here's how it happened." Ames outlined the facts. Dutchy lighted a very rank stogie, sat down beside Ames and listened with only now or then a grunt. At last—

"Reckon you're tellin' the truth," he judged. "But that don't do you much good. These Temouskami people are sure skittish when it comes to anythin' about their property. They paid six million for this here island, two years ago. Some of it's still on mortgage. They're deep in debt for ships, machinery, buildin's, everythin'. But they got a big proposition, an' if they can get out this here contract, they'll pull through, see?"

AMES blew indignant smoke.

"Sure, I see! So when anybody tries to help save their damned place, they slug 'em and jail 'em!"

"I know, but they're more scared o' them North Bay people than an old maid is o' mice. Jumpy an' all that. An' though I reckon Marcotte an' the other Frenchman, whoever he is, really done it, they got it pinned on you, an' there you are. After you're out o' the way, an' things quiet down, they might start trouble again. Might even turn a fire loose on the island. That'd sure be hell!"

"You don't think they'd try to burn the place up, do you?"

"Well, no. Hardly. 'Cause you see, that'd be destroyin' the timber they want themselves. They'll more likely pull some stunt to cripple production—maybe blow up a tower, like they already tried to, or somethin' like that."

"Why not put Manager Lenoir wise to 'em?"

"Nix! *He* wouldn't listen to nothin'. Ain't he a Frenchman himself? An' if I made any accusations I couldn't back up, just on suspicion, I'd get the ax. An' I can't afford to lose my job, these hard times. But—never mind, fella. I'll keep my eyes an' ears peeled. Maybe I can trip them two birds, yet."

"What good'll that do me, if I'm in the pen?"

"Good? It'll get you out, won't it?" exclaimed the Swede. "I'll see what I can do. What I'm worryin' about, most of all, is the off chance they might run wild, figger they couldn't beat us no other way, an' really start a fire. That'd sure be hell an' repeat!"

"Yes, that's right," Ames agreed.

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"This is a regular tinder-box, if fire busted loose."

"Tinder-box ain't the right name for it. Powder-magazine is better. All this dry peat an' undergrowth—whooo! It's sure risky. 'Tain't only that a lot o' men an' hosses would burn up, in out-camps—'cause there's plenty camps here, where if fire run through, they wouldn't have the chance of a spider on a red-hot stove. But even worse'n that might be starvation."

"How do you mean, starvation?"

"Well, supposin' the island was to burn over, after navigation closed, we'd have more'n two thousand, five hundred men to feed till spring break-up. If our grub caches was destroyed, an' the deer an' other animals burnt up, some of us'd go damn hungry before the robins nested again, bullieve me, fella! That's why bein' a fire-boss is turnin' me gray afore my time."

"How the devil d'you ever manage to stop a fire if it once gets going?" asked the American.

"Oh, we got ways," Dutchy smiled, blowing smoke. "We know all the rivers, brooks, clearin's an' lakes that might help us hold it. We got phone lines an' watch towers, all over, an' caches of fire fightin' tools. We can head off fire, make backfires, blow up places with dynamite, run ditches, turn the blaze into lakes, an' so on."

"Quite a trick to it, eh?"

"You're damn whistlin', boy! An' this here island ain't never run away with us, yet. But say, I gotta be goin', now. Keep a stiff upper lip, an' I'll keep thinkin'. Maybe somethin' 'll break, an' you won't get deported, after all. See you again to-morrow 'fore the boat sails."

"Damn good of you to take all this interest in me. I sure appreciate it, Dutchy."

"Oh, 'tain't nothin' but what you'd do fer me, too, if I was in a jam." They shook hands, warmly. "Us white men gotta hang together, or get lynched separate. Well, so long. I'll be seein' you!"

THAT night, a little after twelve, Ames was awakened by a deep-toned whistle from the river front. "The boat!" he realized as he came back to consciousness in his dark, narrow cell. "She's here at last—and to-morrow I start for the pen. The hell, I do!"

He sat up suddenly in his bunk, tingling with a swift and sudden determination—something lawless, adventuresome, deadly perhaps—a game to be played, a gamble to be tried. Escape!

To him it seemed that suddenly veils had been rent and ways made plain. Fool that he had been, to submit! To lie here in jail, waiting for doom to overtake him! To hope that Eve Hilliard might yet save him—that anybody might yet save him, except himself!

"I'm going, and I'm going *pronto!*" Ames decided. The boat's arrival had decided him. Out of this jail, and away—that was his sudden program, now.

Away, where to? Well, off this island, anyhow. There were motor boats to be had. The river was immense, but not impossible. He could certainly contrive to get over to the southern shore, to the mainland. And what then? Forest. Hundreds of miles of forest, of lakes, rivers, marshes, hills and mountains, of barrens perhaps, of bitter hard country. But at the end—his "ain countree," and liberty, and life!

With a calculating eye he examined his cell. His engineering skill and his expertness in judging the strength of

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materials might now stand him in the best of stead.

The window was at one side, out of any direct sight from the door. Constable Buck O'Hara, from that door, could see only the iron bunk.

"All to the good!" the prisoner decided.

Next he studied the window bars. Only the vaguest light penetrated the cell, from a single incandescent lamp down the jail corridor, but it sufficed to show him the bars were of three-quarter inch iron. Six of these bars were vertical, crossed by eight horizontal ones, and all bedded deep in heavy spruce beams.

"I think," judged Ames, "there are grand possibilities in this sort of construction."

He had already in his career solved a good many engineering problems, but never one so vital as this one. Nor had he ever been forced to work without tools. At first, he felt baffled. But almost at once his iron bed offered a possible solution. With even so simple a resource as an iron bed, a determined man can work wonders.

Ames silently slipped into his trousers and pulled on his socks, laid his Mackinaw handy and set his boots where he could grab them in a hurry. Then he started in on the preliminary job of removing the window glass.

He had plenty of old newspapers. Buck O'Hara had at least not stinted him when it came to stale reading matter. Soaking a lot of papers in his water pail, he plastered them carefully against the glass. This done, his hard knuckles broke the panes. Only a few inconsiderable bits fell. Presently, without any incriminating noise, the window-sashes were clear. He twisted those sashes out, with infinite caution, and now was ready to begin operations on the metal grillework that stood between him and liberty.

"So far, okay. Next!"

LISTENING a moment to make sure O'Hara was not on the prowl, Ames stripped his bed. The two detachable side bars looked promising. In a few minutes he had removed these from their sockets.

He was now in possession of a couple of stout iron levers, more than six feet long.

"And when I get these working right, by Gad, something's got to give!"

He inserted both of them, together, between a pair of the gratings. Throwing all the strength of his hundred and eighty pounds into a powerful leverage, he bent the gratings and soon pulled one clear of the wood. Ten minutes' work—now and then listening to make sure the constable was not aroused—succeeded in wrecking the bars to a point where Ames figured he could wriggle through.

But he must not take French leave without substituting a dummy prisoner. Silently putting his bed together again, he arranged his pillow and two blankets in fair semblance of a human figure. Buck O'Hara would have to look sharp, indeed, to discover the fraud. And as for the smashed-up window, that lay out of sight from the cell door.

Ames dropped his boots out of the window and followed them with his third blanket. In case he shouldn't be able to find Dutchy, he'd have at least this much equipment. But if Dutchy was anywhere at all in reach, Ames certainly meant to connect with him.

As the American swung himself out through the window, a bit of jagged glass cut his left palm, that began to

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ooze blood. Never mind scratches! Dare say there'd be plenty of them, and far worse, before the end of this adventuring! His Mackinaw caught on a twisty scrag of iron, and tore in a long gash. He jerked the cloth free, and dropped.

A fall of something like twelve feet did little more than jar him. He stood acutely listening, in darkness behind the jail. Not a sound. He sat down, put on his boots and laced them tight —high boots and heavy—then picked up and rolled his blanket and silently crept away.

Driven by a strong and gusty wind, fleecy clouds obscured the moon, then half-revealed it. A rising, falling chorus of far surfs mingled with vague echoes of labor at the distant pier-head. Away down there he could see a glimmer of lights aboard the supply steamer now tied up at the wharf—the steamer that meant to freight him off to penal servitude. And near that ship, Ames saw the floodlights at the distant loading towers.

Bitterly he thought, "Fat chance that steamer's got to load *me* as cargo! And a lot o' work 'd be going on at Tower Number Two, if it hadn't been for me. And yet these rats want to hand me five to fifteen years o' hell, for having saved 'em! Some joke, eh? Only it's all sour!"

His jaw was tight, mouth hard, as he won to the roadway and in the gloom tramped boldly westward with all the kit he now possessed—blanket, pipe, tobacco and matches. Nobody questioned him; for a figure in high boots and Mackinaw, and carrying a blanket-roll, was utterly commonplace. Of course he had no hat or cap, for his sou'wester had not yet been returned to him. But this mattered nothing. Many a lumberjack went bareheaded.

So, not a soul interfered with him as he passed the *magazin* or general store, crossed the canal jammed with logs, skirted the yard full of huge tractor-sleds, and made his way out of the straggling little settlement.

He met only a vague group of lumberjacks coming in from a completed shift on the pier. His heart beat up with hope and exultation as he left behind him the power house where dynamos were crooning, and struck into the forest road leading toward Chantilly.

"My turn now—if I can only find Dutchy!"

Everything now depended on finding Dutchy, on getting grub and a rifle and cartridges, and a tip as to where best to annex a motor boat. No, after all, Ames wouldn't ask Dutchy to tell him anything about a boat. The grub and shooting gear might be Dutchy's to give away; but the boat would belong to the corporation.

"And I won't ask a square guy like that to help me steal!" Ames decided. "The corporation owes me more than a dozen boats would pay for, so that's all right about my taking one, for myself."

AMES had plenty of time to consider all the possibilities of a getaway, of crossing the immense river where huge seas ran in a wind, of bucking the wilderness beyond; time enough and to spare, during that long hike through the forest. A lonesome way! But a glad one for Ames—if only Dutchy were at Chantilly; if only he weren't away somewhere, timber-cruising or what-not.

Through the gloom pulsed a vague and pale light—the aurora that, streaming upward from the pole, proclaimed King Winter already with terrible banners on the march.

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For companionship the American had only his keen eagerness for freedom, hate of his persecutors, and rather a scornful suspicion of Eve Hilliard. The girl had never come back to see him again, never communicated with him again. A fine friendship, that! After all, mightn't she be a spy on him—one of the Marcotte-Durand unholy alliance?

"Trust a girl, and be made a damned fool of!" growled Ames. "That's a good motto to remember!"

Doggedly he plodded onward in the wind-swept night. After an eternity he caught dim sight of the Chantilly Farm buildings. His heart began to pound a bit quickly. These next few minutes would be critical; would tell the whole story; might mean life or death for him.

Now he strode to the building he knew was headquarters, and boldly pounded on the door. Nothing could be gained by stealth. A bold front and lots of brass—these were the program now.

Never in life had he received a benediction one-tenth so welcome as the muffled roar that, with a shower of blasphemies, presently greeted him from inside headquarters.

"Hello, there. Who the hell's that, an' what the hell you want, this time o' night?"

"Open up!" Ames replied. "Official business. Make it snappy!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE GREATER URGE.

THE silence of an awakening realization that something urgent was afoot greeted this command. Then feet shuffled, a match-flame glimmered, and a lantern began to shed uncertain light. A bolt shot back. Ames found himself confronted by a very dishevelled and sketchily dressed Swede.

"Hello, fella!" the blinking Dutchy ejaculated. "By golly, somethin' must be doin'! What the blazes—an' how the devil'd *you* get here?"

Ames pushed into the room and shut the door. Under his bandages, his eyes were glowering as he burst forth:

"Look a' here, Dutchy! Only a damned fool will sit still and let a bunch of high-binders railroad him the way they're doing to me! I'm fed up, see? I busted out o' jail, and I'm on my way, and—"

"On your way? Where to, man?"

"To hell, for all I care! Anywhere, just to get away from this forsaken island and this bunch o' crooks! And you've got to help me, Dutchy. Us white men got to stick together! Give me a rifle, some ammunition and grub, and—"

"And what then? You're nuts!" Amazed, the fire-boss stared at this excited American with the blanket-roll. "How far'd you get, on this island, or—"

"I tell you I'm not going to stay on the lousy island! There are boats, aren't there? With motors in 'em? Well, I'm going to grab me a boat, and—"

"An' what then, fella? We're a hell of a long ways from the U. S. A., don't you ferget that. An' winter comin' on, an—"

"What the devil do I care for that? I'll take a chance on it. They're not going to frame *me*, and get away with it. And in a pinch, if it comes to shooting it out with 'em, well, I can do that, too!"

"I dunno, boy." And Dutchy looked very grave. "You had a rough toss, but this here may be rougher. This

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idea of tryin' to do a marathon through the wilderness, livin' on what you can pick up—if the wolves don't get you, on the way. Personally, I wouldn't give a plugged wooden nickel fer your chances o' gettin' through. Why not stick, an' fight—take an appeal, an'—"

"Appeal be damned! The only appeal I want is an appeal to my own legs and my trigger finger! There's no justice here—no help. Why, even that girl—Eve Hilliard, you know—who might have done something for me—"

"What about the girl?" cut in Dutchy, with quick interest.

"She came to see me, once. Said she might do something. But did she? Not a damn thing. Never came back. Just like all the rest of 'em, and—"

"I dunno about that," cut in the Swede, his blue eyes narrowing in that raw lantern-light. "Mebbe she couldn't."

"Why couldn't she?"

"You ain't heard? No, 'course you couldn't. But—"

"But what?" demanded Ames. "She isn't sick, is she? Or hurt, or something?"

"Don't know. That's the whole trouble. She—she's just gone, that's all."

"Gone? What d'you mean, gone?" the American shot at Dutchy, a sudden twinge of anxiety in his heart. "I don't get you. Left her job, and quit, or—?"

DUTCHY shrugged massive shoulders, and for a moment made no answer. Silence fell in that crude room with its pot-bellied stove, built-in bunk, rough tables covered with maps and blueprints, walls where charts and graphs were tacked to unplaned boards.

"Well, what's the idea?" insisted Ames. "Gone—the girl's gone—where?"

"That's what everybody'd like to know," said the fire-boss. "She's been missin' two days. They been huntin' fer her, all over, but not a trace. Where the devil she could be, who knows? The island's some steamed up over it, too."

Silence grew more taut. Suddenly Ames broke it:

"By Gad, you don't suppose—?"

"Suppose what?"

"Those two, Marcotte and Durand—"

"You mean they might ha'—"

"Might have made way with her," exclaimed the American, "for knowing too damn much? If I thought they had—" and his fists knotted, "if I thought they *had*—"

"You know what thought done," Dutchy affirmed. "There's allus a chance a couple o' skunks like them might do somethin' dirty. But why would they, now? What them two got against the girl?"

"Plenty! It'd take too long to go into all that now, Dutchy, but they know she's pretty well hep to their game. And another thing—they may know she came to see me in jail and promised to help me, if she could!"

"Yeah, they might know she come to see you," Dutchy admitted, "but how the heck could they be wise to what she promised?"

"Couldn't that mick of a constable have poked his big ear into what she told me, and reported to 'em? I tell you, Dutchy, this looks bad."

"Yep, that's right, it does. We gotta think now, fella—gotta think, if we ever did in all our lives."

"All right, you go ahead and think!" cried Ames, flinging down his blanket-roll. "I'm going to do more than think. I'm going to get busy!"

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"You mean skip out?"

"Skip out? Say, what do you think I am, anyhow? That girl's in a jam on account of me, that's a bet. What kind of a yellow-backed quitter would I be, if I made my getaway now and left her holding the bag—or in it? Guess again, Dutchy! I'm going to stick right here on this island. I'm going right back to Port Murchison, as quick as the Lord 'll let me, and start something!"

"Start something? What the blazes can you start, except your own way back into jail?"

"Lord knows! But it's going to be something lively, boy, you take it from me. Believe it or not, Dutchy, if those two skunks have pulled any rough stuff on that girl, there'll be some Fourth o' July fireworks round these diggings before I'm through!"

Dutchy grinned with a very great rejoicing as he looked upon the American's hate-fevered face and saw the hard-fisted swing of his paws.

"Atta boy!" he approved. "Now you're talkin' the kind o' verbs an' adjectives I like to hear. Now I'm with you, to the finish. Come along, fella—let's go!"

AT a brisk clip the two men struck east toward Port Murchison, along the dark wilderness road. At first they said little, for all their breath was needed to buck that rough way and ever more boisterous wind. The night kept growing wilder, as the autumnal storm strengthened. Through lulls of the increasing gale, hollow thunders of surf drifted from afar.

"This ain't such a picnic, fella," at last remarked the Swede. "Not after a guy's been on the hoof all day, same as I have."

"I suppose not. But what the devil do we care? Who's looking for picnics, in a place like this? Say, Dutchy!"

"Well, what?"

"You know this island like a book, don't you?"

"Better 'n I know most books. Why?"

"If those two skunks have grabbed the girl, to keep her from spilling any beans about 'em, where'd they most likely take her to?"

"God knows, mebbe."

"They wouldn't dare kill her, would they?"

"Them two hellions 'd dare anythin'. But I don't reckon they gone that far, already. Way I've got it doped out is that they're prob'ly hidin' her up, somewheres, till you're deported an' safe out o' the way."

"What good 'll that do 'em? The minute she's free, she can blow the works, can't she?"

"I dunno," judged the Swede. "They might put it up to her as how, if she wanted to keep on livin', she'd hafta keep her mouth shut, an' let on she'd only been lost in the bush, like. No tellin' what kind o' tricks them two wouldn't play, on a pinch."

"God, if we could only find her! Where 'd they be most likely to hide her?"

"Well, some abandoned camp, somewheres," judged the fire-boss, as they slogged on along the rough and painful road. "There's a few such, scattered through the island."

"But haven't they all been searched?"

"I reckon so. But look. Them fellas are foxy, all right. They could park her out in the woods, daytimes. Tie her up, like. The searchin's only been done in the day. Nights, they could take her to some deserted camp, an'—"

"Damn their black hearts! But—

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have they been reported absent from the bunk house?"

"No. That is, not all night. But between quittin'-time an' lights-out, they could have time to work their racket on her. An' that, by jolly—that gives me an idea!"

"What kind of an idea?"

"An idea about what 'd be the likeliest place they might have her hid up. I mean, if it's anywhere, it's prob'ly some old camp not far from the Port. Might be Number Eight, on the Rivière Noire tote-road, or Number Four on the Lac Chaloupe trail. Or—no, them's the only two that'd do, in case I got this here thing doped right."

Ames ripped out a blistering curse. Then:

"That's where we're going now, Dutchy!" he announced. "Which is the one nearest here?"

"Number Four. We strike the trail not more 'n five mile ahead."

"Fine! If we can only locate her—! But, too damn bad, in that case, we can't round up the pair o' Frenchmen, too."

"They might be there, at that."

"How could they, when they have to be at the bunk house, nights?"

"Well, this here bein' the last night afore you're goin' to be deported, they might risk stayin' out. Any man that's out all night allus has a good excuse—can say he slept at some out-camp, an' if he's got friends there to stick up fer his alibi, he's all jake. Anyhow, what's the use botherin' with this, that an' the other? Main thing is to locate the gal, ain't it?"

"Sure is—and then pay a hell of a big debt I owe Marcotte and Durand. Say, Dutchy, you didn't think to stick a gun in your pocket, did you?"

"No. Why would I? We could get a couple, though, by goin' back."

"No. Devil with that! Time's what counts, now."

BOTH men were sweating, breathing hard, but still full of plentiful reserve energy as at the end of a little more than an hour they struck southward into the Chaloupe trail.

This was nothing but the roughest kind of corduroy road, built of spruce logs. In the vagrant light of the hide-and-seek moon, now and then the hurrying pair saw deer bound across the path and away. Ames not infrequently stumbled as this hard path snaked through the forest. The Swede, surer-footed, made better going of it.

Presently they crossed a spur of the island's crude logging railroad and plunged into ever deeper wilderness. They slogged forward through barrens where fire, the great crimson enemy, had raided Temouskami—only to be subdued, repulsed.

"Talk about your rocky road to Dublin!" growled the Swede. "It's got nothin' on this."

"Yeah, and imagine a girl out in a place like this!" Ames grunted. "Hello, what's that?"

He halted, gripped Enemark by the arm.

"By jolly, there's a light!" the Swede exclaimed, lowering his voice. "That's Camp Number Four, all righto. Supposed to be deserted—but it ain't. Not to-night. If we ain't located the birds we're after, I'm wrong an' then some!"

Together they scouted forward. Vagrant moon-gleams furnished glimpses of this deep forest camp. All round it lay high piled barricades of slash and dry-kye, that had been flung there when this clearing had been hewn from the wilderness.

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A fire-trap, if there ever was one! Men caught in such a place might easily be roasted alive, like ants in an oven.

Round the edge of the clearing, Ames could make out the dim bulk of six or seven log huts; low squatting structures with tarpaper roofs, their walls chinked with moss and hay. The open center was rough with logs, stumps, chips and old woodpiles, broken wheels, abandoned sleds. Here huge bowlders projected, there deep ruts yawned.

Over all lay the oppression of complete solitude; over all, save one hut at the left of the camp. Somebody was in that shack. Through one of its tiny paned windows trembled a ray of lantern-light. This light also showed through a crack round the heavy plank door, and faintly glimmered up the boxlike ventilator in the roof.

Dutchy raised a cautioning hand. Silently they pushed ahead.

Now they entered the clearing, ringed by black sentinels of conifers that swayed in the boisterous, chill wind. An intermittent roaring of this wind masked any sound of their approach. None the less it was with extreme circumspection that they approached the bunk house.

"Reckon we've located 'em, okay, fella!" whispered the Swede, elated.

"And a damn good guess you made, boy. A *damn* good guess!" Ames returned as they skirted round toward the back of the bunk house. Here they saw another dimly outlined window. This window, some of its panes shattered out, was about five feet from the chip strewn earth.

With infinite caution Ames reached the window, risked a peep through it. The Swede followed suit.

Ames's heart bumped with exultation. Yes, there he saw his quarry! Marcotte and Durand—there they were, the precious pair of them!

THE American felt Dutchy's powerful fingers close in a vise-like grip on his arm. Small need of that warning! For in this crisis, Ames was already breathing through his open mouth, for greater silence.

His eyes, hard-squinting, photographed every detail of that squalid place. The bunk house, he saw, had two rooms. The door of the second loomed darkly at the right. In the room now visible, by the glimmer of a smoky lantern on a rough-adzed table, Ames and the fire-boss saw their enemies.

Even though Marcotte and Durand were sitting on a bench with their backs toward the window, there could be no possible mistaking the men. The bunk house, filthy and disordered in its abandonment, seemed a fitting place for them. Hay and dried spruce boughs lay in rude bunks and on the floor of knotty poles. Discarded boots, old newspapers, rags, tobacco tins and junk were scattered all about; and over this repulsive confusion the lantern struggled to cast some dejected glimmers through its smoked globe.

A moment Ames and the Swede stared in at the Frenchmen, very much as a couple of starving tomcats might stare at two rats in a trap. They hungered for meat, but wondered just how to get at it. But that they would get at it, was positive.

Unlike trapped rats surveyed by famished toms, the Frenchmen remained totally oblivious to the fact that they were being watched by hostile eyes.

They were both deep in talk. Durand was tapping the table planks with the stub of his amputated left forefinger. Marcotte was mumbling round the

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shank of a clay pipe thrust into his fish-like slit of a mouth. Now or then he spat copiously, and growled black oaths.

Tense as piano wire, Ames and the Swede crouched listening at the broken window.

CHAPTER VII.

DEFIANCE.

WHERE, Ames wondered, might the girl be? Anxiety gripped him; but the stress of the moment welded all his attention just to whatever fragmentary words might reach him from inside the hut.

There, the Frenchmen's voices dully grumbled. During every lull of the wind, half-caught syllables came drifting.

"That was a devil of a mess you made of things!" gibed Durand. "A lot of good *you* did the North Bay people!"

"Mebbe you done better, you'self?" Marcotte retorted.

"I did my part, with the wires. Then it was up to you!"

"But w'at I could do, me, wit' dat damn American buttin' in on me?"

A gust of wind swallowed their words. But presently the listeners could hear again:

"—Devilish quick, too!" It was Durand speaking. "The American's out of it. He'll be on his way, to-morrow, for a good long rest. After that, we can—"

Another gust. The words faded.

"If them fellars don't land in hell," growled the fire-boss, "it'll be 'cause there ain't no such place!"

"We'll make it, for 'em! A specially hot one!"

"By jolly, wish we had a pair o' guns!"

"We've got our fists, haven't we?"

"What the devil good are fists, against guns? It's a safe bet they're heeled."

"That's a chance we've got to take," whispered Ames. "Let's get going!"

"Hold everything," the Swede warned. "Clubs is trumps, this time!"

Stooping, Dutchy felt about on the rough ground, laid hold of a stout balsam stick and hefted it with appreciation. Ames found a rock-maple wagon-spoke, formidable as a shillalah. This he swung, getting its feel and balance.

"When this connects—!" he grinned.

"You guard the window," directed Dutchy. "I'll tackle 'em through the door."

"Nothing doing! We'll both rush 'em, together!"

"Okay by me, old kid!" agreed the fire-boss, with Viking lusts of battle beginning to burn. "Let her go!"

Armed only with their clubs, and facing they knew not what weapons, both attackers advanced toward the door. But as they reached it, Ames froze in his tracks. For another voice had reached him, from inside the shanty.

A woman's voice—the voice of Eve Hilliard.

"SO then, you think I'm going to promise you anything like that?" the girl was asking. "You've got quite a few more thinks coming!"

Ames surged at the door. But Dutchy's steel grip on his shoulder spun him round.

"Wait!" breathed the Swede. "Listen, now—we learn a lot more!"

"Wait, nothing! They've got Eve in there, and I'm—"

"Shut up, you blazin' fool!" And Dutchy dragged him back to the rear

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window again. "Ain't you got the brains of a louse? We gotta find out all we can!"

Through all Ames's red-headed rage and hate he recognized the Swede's superior strategy. Together the allies once more peeped through the window.

At sight of Eve Hilliard facing her captors, who confronted her with sneering insolence, Ames felt his heart pound heavily. He saw the girl's wrists were bruised, as if by cords. Her lips, too, were swollen where a gag had cut them.

"Easy, fella!" whispered the fire-boss. His heavy hand steadied the American, who quivered to fling all caution to the birds and crash in with immediate attack. "Take it easy, now!"

Inside the shack Durand was thinly smiling as he asked:

"Wouldn't it really be advisable for you to make terms with us? That is, if you value your health?"

Eve shrugged scornful shoulders.

"Look a' here, you!" cut in Marcotte. "We ain't foolin'. By damn, if we are! You better be good, *ma fille*, an' not go spillin' no beans about us!"

At this, Eve laughed as at some excellent joke.

"Ah, dry up, dat!" the Frenchman snarled. His fists clenched on his bandy knees; he spat into the straw. "We ain't ketch you an' bring you here to listen to no laughin', *savez?* We bring you to keep you' mouth shut!"

"Really, now?" she mocked. "How interesting!"

"We make it interestin'! If you ain't want to listen reason yet, back you go in dat odder room, wit' de rope on you' hands again, wit' de rag in you' mouth! Well, w'at say? You goin' have some sense, or we got to learn you?"

"Wait a minute, there," interrupted Durand, his smile more dangerous than any threats. "Just let me handle the young lady. You're a bit crude, Marcotte, and—"

"Aw, hell!" fulminated the lumberboss. "Put her back in dere an' tie her up again. Dat's de way to h'argue wit' a woman!"

"Not at all," Durand retorted, while outside the shack both listeners clung to every word. "Listen, my dear *mademoiselle*. All that this amounts to is just a little business proposition. You have something to sell—your silence. We want to buy it. Well, why not strike a bargain?"

"I might, if you make the price high enough," she gaily derided him.

"What price silence, then?"

"You and your ingenious friend, here, write out a full confession that will clear Mr. Ames, and give it to me. Then take yourselves off the island, and never come back. There, now! Those are my terms. Grant them, and I'll promise never to breathe a word to anybody as to who you really are!"

"Ah, so then," nodded the Frenchman, stroking his black beard, "*mademoiselle* amuses herself by jesting, eh? Well, perhaps we can jest, too. You happen to believe my name is not Jean Durand, but Henri Archambauld. Who I really am doesn't matter in the least. I merely don't want to be called by that particular name of Archambauld, on this particular island, and—"

"And why not, pray?"

"Never mind why not. The fact remains. And therefore my friend and I have had the pleasure of bringing you here for a business conference, as one might say. How long before we can arrive at terms?"

"Terms? Why, I've already given

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you my terms. What more do you want?"

"Think it over, very carefully, my dear *mademoiselle.*" His voice had become smoother than silk. "You are young yet, and—well, life ought to be sweet. Not a living soul knows where you are, except my friend and I. It would be just another case of 'mysterious disappearance,' in case—well, in case you never returned to Port Murchison. So you see—"

THE man, who had finally tacitly admitted his identity as Archambauld, caressed his beard, awaited her reply. None came.

Suddenly, with a furious blasphemy, Marcotte leaped to his feet.

"You ain't promise?" he bellowed, like all the bulls of Bashan. "By damn, ain't no woman goin' ruin *us!*" He seized her shoulder in a gorilla grip, brutally shook her. "Dyin', dat will be de easy part of it, for you! 'Fore you die, you goin' learn what is Canuck lumber-boss when he mad!"

And with a twist of her arm he threw her toward the door of the inner room. She stumbled, fell against a bunk and for a moment lay there, dazed and huddled in the mocking gaiety of her Mackinaw.

"None of that rough stuff, yet!" shouted Archambauld, springing up. "You keep your dirty paws off her. This is my show!"

"Aw, you!" sneered the lumber-boss. His gash of a mouth, slit-eyes and cropped ear made him uglier than any Chinese demon. "You, wit' all dem fine word an' po-lite manners! If you was half de man I am, me—we damn soon finish dis. But you, coward, sissy, *fils de—*"

Stung past any bearing, Archambauld lashed out a furious blow. Marcotte took it fair on the chin. It hardly rocked him. Archambauld might as well have smashed his fist against Gibraltar.

The lumber-boss snarled into something like a laugh as he scooped Archambauld up with one grab of his simian paw. He swung his adversary round like a rag-baby, and slung him at the side of the shack.

Had Archambauld hit the logs there, full tilt, he would have been little more than a skinful of broken bones. But on the way he caromed over the table.

And the table crashed; and with it, the lantern. Archambauld crumpled in a tangle of broken bunk-stanchions.

Smash! went the lantern in a jingle of broken glass. Ablaze like a smoky meteor, it spun into a heap of powdery-dry straw. Burning oil spattered constellations of swift brightness. Greasy smoke coiled.

Fire leaped up.

Fire, arch-enemy of all on Temouskami Island, Fire, nightmare of those dark frontiers. Fire!

CHAPTER VIII.

WAR!

ALL hands should have called a truce, to battle that scarlet enemy. But hate and passion were inflamed past any rationality.

And now, as Archambauld struggled to leap murderously at the Canuck, invasion burst upon them both.

The door crashed. In tumbled the attackers, swinging clubs.

"Hell, boy—give 'em hell!" roared Dutchy. "Hell an' repeat!"

His cudgel cracked on Marcotte's one remaining ear. As Eve struggled up unsteadily to her feet, the lumber-

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boss staggered back. Yammering, he plunged a-grovel into the burning straw.

Archambauld hauled himself out of the tangle of broken stanchions. With a curse he grabbed at his hip. A gun leaped to view.

Before he could draw a bead, Ames clouted him squarely. The man sprawled. His .44 whanged, but the bullet only bored a log.

The American landed another wallop. Archambauld's gun gyrated into the blazing straw.

Ames snatched it up with his left hand. But once more it spun away as Marcotte—his Mackinaw smoking in a dozen places—surged up and slashed at Ames with a razor-keen dirk. Ames felt the bite of steel on his forearm. Crimson drops sprayed from his fingers as he battered Marcotte down. The knife flew glimmering in that smoky light.

But when Ames leaped on the bull-necked Frenchman, he found he'd caught a Tartar. For, grunting oaths, Marcotte grabbed his throat. Ames choked, with gorilla-fingers throttling him.

The fingers tightened. Ames heard a buzzing. His lungs seemed about to burst—everything grew black. But with a supreme spasm of energy he smashed his fists on Marcotte's grinning snags of teeth.

Where was Dutchy? Why didn't Dutchy help him?

But the Swede was busy on his own account.

Archambauld, only half stunned, had struggled up and, warding a cudgel blow, had closed with Dutchy. Now panting, straining, they too were locked in primitive and caveman war.

Blasphemies, grunts of pain, gasps intermingled. Smoke thickened. Shadows leaped, cast by the swiftly mounting flames. That was a scene unreal, confused, formidable.

Wrenching free, Archambauld tripped the Swede and felled him; raised a foot to "spike" him in the face. Some two dozen sharp steel nails in a lumberman's boot may settle a man for life. Once properly spiked, the victim—even though he escape blindness—will remain a curious bit of human patchwork till he dies.

But Archambauld's spikes did not slash the fire-boss's face. Archambauld howled as a club dropped him. This club was the one that Ames had let fall. Now Eve Hilliard was wielding it.

No shrinking violet or clinging vine, this girl! She could swing a wicked cudgel, in a pinch. And now Archambauld crumpled like an empty sack.

Eve ran to the obscure ruck of battle under the table—battle between Ames and Marcotte. Where to strike? Blinking through the smoke, she paused to gauge a blow that would finish Marcotte without hurting Ames. But things were all atangle, in the straw where flames were swiftly spreading. Smeared with blood from the American's slashed arm, Ames and Marcotte were far gone in berserk war.

A sudden opening!

Wham!

Eve's blow sounded like a home run. The Canuck's ape-fingers relaxed. He quivered, lay knocked cold.

RELEASED, Ames gulped air. Dutchy dragged him to his feet.

"Come on, now! You're okay!"

"Sure . . . am! That fire—we've got to—"

Already Eve was at work, trying to stamp it out. Not a chance! Mocking her, it leaped up the walls. She

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snatched a ragged blanket from a bunk, began to flail.

"Atta girl!" the Swede shouted. Hauling off his Mackinaw he whipped at the flames. Ames sprang to help him—but spied Archambauld reviving, groping toward his gun.

"No use!" cried the American. "We've got to tie these birds up. Till we do, no chance for us to do anything with the fire!"

They jumped Archambauld, held him pinned like a rattlesnake. Enemark snatched out the heavy thong lacing from one of Archambauld's high boots.

"Maybe this 'll hold him!"

With bloody and contorted face, Archambauld struggled. Ames sat on him, grinding that black beard into the filthy straw. Thickening smoke choked, blinded them all. Though Eve still beat at the flames, these steadily devoured more and ever more of the straw filled bunks. Already they had begun crackling up the greasy stanchions.

Archambauld's strength amazed his assailants. Like steel springs, his muscles formed tough ridges. But Dutchy and the American outmatched him. They wrenched his tense arms round behind his back.

"Now, that bootlace!"

As Ames forced the man's wrists together, Dutchy lashed them with the thong that bit deep into purpling flesh.

"Damn you!" snarled Archambauld. "You'll pay for this—you two, and the girl!"

They dragged him to his feet. Ames picked up the gun.

"If you try to skip, you damn pirate," he warned, "you'll put on some weight, sudden—the weight o' six bullets!"

Ignoring Archambauld's curses, they wrenched the leather lacing from his other boot, and with it tied up Marcotte in like fashion. Then they dragged him, still unconscious, out of the flaming shack, and dumped him. After them stumbled Archambauld, in his high unlaced boots.

Dutchy laughed: "Fat chance *they* get now, to beat it! Marcotte's out, cold. An' this lousy Archambauld, I'd like to see him run, in them loose boots! An' if he kicks 'em off, how far can he get through the bush, in his socks?"

"Forget it, Dutchy! We got to tackle that fire." And Ames jammed Archambauld's gun into his hip pocket. "You're a fire-boss, aren't you? Now do your stuff!"

THEY lunged back into swirls of choking vapor, where Eve was still fighting. Ames's hand continued to drip blood, from his wounded arm, but what did trifles matter? Every second was golden. Oil and hay, dry spruce boughs and needles—the place was a regular tinder-box.

Already half the floor had become a bed of bright flames. Fire was gnawing the walls. Eve's toil was a mere brave gesture of futility. Her whipping blanket only spread the blaze. Ames dragged her out into the clearing.

"How—in the world did *you*—ever get here?" she panted.

"Never mind! Stay here—watch the prisoners!" He dived into the hut, thick with choking fumes.

Both men stamped, thrashed. Hopeless task! Blinded and strangling, Dutchy stumbled back.

"No good! Might 's well go against hell with a spoonful o' water!" he gasped, one arm shielding his scorched face. Heavy smoke-whirls filled the hut, mingled with lurid flares. As wind gusted through the door, flames whipped blue. They leaped, caught

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elsewhere. The two men could barely see each other. Every breath was torment.

"Got to get help—quick!" gulped Ames. "Where's your nearest phone?"

"Camp Nine—back to the main road an'—half a mile west!" The tow-hair round the edge of Enemark's cap was singed, like his eyebrows. "Out o' here!"

He and Ames stumbled out into the clearing. Coughing, they freed their lungs.

"Can't you hold it?" cried Eve. "Got too much of a start?"

"Dunno!" the fire-boss choked out. "If them two hellions 'd only take a-holt, we might get it under, yet!"

But now it seemed hopeless. The ravening flame-wolf was loose and raging. From door and windows dense smoke came streaming, sucking away in long fantastic whirls on the roistering wind. Moonlight made derisive ghosts of these smoke-banners, ghosts that fled and menaced.

The glare of that swift-spreading conflagration showed the hand-bound captives. Archambauld was stupidly a-stare; Marcotte, beginning to revive, crouched by a spruce stump.

Ames strode to the black-bearded Archambauld.

"Even a rat 'll fight for life, in a trap! We're all trapped here. If we turn you loose, will you bear a hand?"

Archambauld grudgingly nodded.

"Yes. Necessity knows no law."

"And how about you, Marcotte?"

"Huh? Oh—sure, yes. I help!"

"Come on," said Ames. "Let's cut 'em loose."

"Damn sight rather let 'em burn!"

"Can't let 'em burn! Got to keep 'em alive, for trial. If they burn, I'm maybe in for fifteen years. Their confession—got to be used in court!"

"Yeah, that's so, too!"

Enemark whipped out his knife. He cut the thongs. Both captives rubbed bruised wrists. Ames dived into a horse-shed. He dragged out some ragged old horse-blankets.

A couple of these he flung at Archambauld and Marcotte.

"Get busy, you!" he ordered, with fire-glow ruddy on his sweating face and tousled red hair that stuck up all ways through his bandages. "Busy—and no funny business, you swine, or—!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE CRIMSON ENEMY.

NEED enough, for action!

Now like a brazier glowed the door of the blazing shanty. Every window glared blood-red with hellish light that eerily illuminated the clearing. As the two released captives sullenly picked up the blankets, Eve cried:

"We've just *got* to have help! I'm going to run to Camp Nine!"

"Atta baby!" the fire-boss approved. "Run like—you know what!"

As she faded, all four men fell to battling the crimson enemy. Their figures moved fantastically in a sort of devil-dance against bright backgrounds of flame.

"Let the damn camp go!" shouted Dutchy. "She's a goner, anyhow. Keep the fire from spreadin' to the slash—that's all we can do now!"

Hungry flames were leaping to their work, with fatal greed. Door, windows, roof-ventilator were vomiting thick clouds, shot through with fire tongues and wild spark eddies—infernal devil's pinwheels of destruction.

Swirling, spiraling aloft and onward

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as the wind snatched them, firebrands fled and vanished through the dark forest. Most of them died where they dropped. But some of the largest, trailing smoke-comets, landed among the dry-kye barriers round the clearing.

In a score of places, a hundred, these red seeds of destruction blossomed swiftly to horrible crimson flowers.

An ominous crackling began to mingle with the dull-droning hum of fire in the hut, now belching like a volcano. The forest wavered with grotesque and terrible light.

This light revealed Marcotte and Archambauld whipping at fires that spread through the barriers. Even a mutinous crew, sure of prison when the ship reaches port, will man the pumps. And now a deadlier peril than that of ocean confronted the plotters—peril of being roasted in a forest fire.

Moreover, were they to break for freedom, what then? Vengeance would pursue. So long as the girl and Ames and Dutchy should remain alive, damning accusations would be lodged against them.

So for the moment what could they do but bear a hand, and bide their time for some more favorable turn of fate?

Dutchy was working like ten men.

Scorched, sweating, blackened, he flailed with a horse-blanket. He smote out flames in the slash, left them mere glowing embers. Each was easy to kill; but for every one thus deadened, a dozen elsewhere burst into life. And as the fire grew, strangling heat — heat that shriveled—filled the enclosure.

Ames, panting and in shirt sleeves—paying no heed to his wound that still seeped red—fought just as hard as the Swede. Their task was like that of Hercules trying to kill the Hydra. For every head cut off, others swiftly sprouted.

Ever more blinding grew the smoke. A hideous and spectral glare filled the woods, reddening the log hut all round the camp.

SO tensely battling that now they had quite forgotten Archambauld and the Canuck, neither Ames nor Dutchy gave them any thought. Dutchy was at work near the cabin; Ames, fifty yards away.

Winded, spent, Ames paused a moment to breathe, dash sweat from his scorched eyes. He glanced about.

"Look out there, Dutchy!" he yelled. "*Look out!*"

Archambauld had dropped his blanket, picked up a heavy sled-stake. Murderous cudgel in hand, he had crouched up behind the Swede.

At Ames's yell, Archambauld struck.

The warning swung Enemark to one side. That deadly blow missed the Swede's head. But it hurled him staggering with an almost broken shoulder.

Ames jerked the gun from his hip. As Archambauld struck again the American fired.

Archambauld dropped, clutching his right knee. His hands, pressing the wound, grew crimson.

Marcotte howled like a wolf as he flung himself at Enemark. But the Swede blinded him with a thrash of his fire-riddled blanket. Ames ran in. Together they beat the lumber-boss down.

"Curse their black souls to brimstone!" roared Dutchy. "Long as they're free, there's trouble with 'em. Come on, fella, tie 'em up again—an' if they burn, let 'em burn. There's old ropes in the hovel. Get busy!"

Once more they triced up their prisoners, and this time dragged them across the clearing to its windward side, there lashing them to a couple of rugged spruces.

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"Stay there now, till wanted!" Dutchy spat, rubbing his shoulder. "Burn an' be damned to you! You'll only be rehearsin' hell, anyhow, so what's the diff?"

"Listen!" whined Archambauld. "You can't do this!" His face had gone waxen with panic. "I'm shot—bleeding. If I don't get to a doctor right off, I'll die!"

"Atta boy! Go to it, an' be sure you make good!"

And with no further parley, Dutchy and Ames ran back to their task of trying to hold the fire till help should come.

But now this task had clearly grown hopeless. Roaring and a-crackle, the fire swiftly gained. Trees began to go up in explosions of resin and gas. With a snapping crescendo, then a swift rush, flames leaped clear to their tops. Those flames gulped needles and twigs, clung like ruby beads to the larger branches.

Vivid fire-rain pattered down. More trees caught, and ever more. Night grew ruddy with the wild, resistless onslaught of the Crimson Enemy.

CHAPTER X.

VICTORY!

"NOTHIN' for it!" Enemark at last owned himself beaten. He recoiled, blinded and a-scorch, with a smoldering half of a horse-blanket that dangled from his blistered hand.

"Quit, eh?" panted Ames.

"What the devil else is there to do? We got no more chance to hold this fire, just you an' me, than what ants would have to put out a volcano. Lucky to save our own skins now!"

From the other side of the clearing, Archambauld and the Canuck were beginning to clamor in an agony of terror. With shouts to be set free, they cursed, howling like trapped jackals. Dutchy and Ames only laughed them to scorn.

"Holler an' be damned to you!" the fire-boss mocked. "A little cookin' will make roast pork o' you. Or mebbe fried rattlesnake!"

Whether his enemies burned up or not seemed the least of Enemark's worries. And that they might was distinctly on the cards. One whole side of the clearing had now become a sea of roaring flame. Three or four more of the shacks were smoking. The hovel had caught, and a cook house had begun to blaze. Only a few minutes more, and every building in camp would be adding its fury to the general destruction.

Ames and Dutchy fell back toward the corduroy tote-road that afforded the only possible line of escape.

"See here, though," said Ames, "when it comes right down to cases, we've got to get those lousy crooks out o' here. If only to clear me."

"Yeah, I'm afraid so. But let 'em get the fear o' God into 'em, with a good warm-up, afore we cut 'em loose. It 'll be the first time ever they had that fear, or any other!"

Presently even Dutchy relented. Shielding their faces from the intolerable scorch, he and Ames cut the ropes that bound Marcotte and Archambauld to the spruces. The upper branches of these trees were already beginning to smoke. Marcotte could walk, but his companion had to be dragged along, limping and reviling. His blood-soaked leg caused him exquisite agony, over the rough going. Both men still had their hands lashed behind them.

"Suffer an' be damned!" growled

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Enemark. "All the sympathy you get out o' me, you carrion, you could put in a gnat's eye!"

"Tie 'em together," suggested Ames. "That 'll help hold up Archambauld, and keep Marcotte from skipping out."

"Okay! You got a good head on you, fella," the fire-boss agreed. He and Ames, cutting some excess rope from the captives' bonds, lashed Archambauld's right arm to the other's left. Thus secured, the prisoners hobbled along like a grotesque pair of Siamese twins.

"An' a handsome brace o' crooks you are, too, on your way to the pen!" Enemark mocked. "I only hope you both live to get there!"

THE clearing had become bright as day—a frightful, blood-red day that cast ruddy reflections on the low-skimming clouds. Awakened birds fluttered about with dazed, mournful cries. Startled deer bounded across the road. An elk crashed into heavy timber; and somewhere to eastward, querulous grunts told of a bear on the trek. Driven by the greatest Titan of all—King Flame—the forest folk were giving ground.

"Lucky the wind's away from Port Murchison, an' towards the river!" judged Enemark, his voice hardly audible through the mounting tumult of that fervent storm—a tumult of sharp-crackling, breaking wood, of roaring flames, exploding tree-trunks full of sap. "If 'twas the other way, might sweep the whole damn island. But even as 'tis, it 'll clean a few thousand acres. An' that's a whale of a lot o' money gone to Tophet!"

"I'm glad it's no more!"

"'Twouldn't be this, even, if I had a few gangs here with shovels an' dynamite! If I only had a chance to ditch an' backfire, I could hold her yet. But with just the pair of us, an' no tools—"

A shout, from somewhere off to eastward, stopped him.

"Ooooo-*eee!*" it pierced the tumult. "Ooooooo-*eeeee!*"

Dutchy set palms to mouth; belled into a long-drawn, powerful hail. Then he commanded:

"Give 'em a few shots!"

Ames emptied his gun, crackling, toward the ruddy sky.

"That's a gang from Camp Nine?" he asked.

"Must be. An' it's a cinch they've phoned Port Murchison. Fire-tower Twelve must ha' sighted this, too. We'll mebbe hold her yet, by Judas Priest!"

Heartened by reviving hope, they waited in the corduroy road, close by their sullen captives. The sheer gorgeous splendor of the spectacle half-hypnotized them. But soon, as the fire steadily mounted, they had to retreat again.

Help, though, was already close at hand. Reinforcements were coming, on the run. Once more hails sounded, ever nearer, louder. Through the roar and crackle of wind lashed flames, a welcome tumult reached them.

AND all at once, in that harsh glare, vanguards of the rescuing army plunged into view. Streaming along the road, a dozen—a score—a hundred men came full pelt. And as they charged, wildly they shouted.

"Come a-runnin', boys!" yelled Dutchy, waving long arms. Swiftly energized once more, he forgot his burns, exhaustion, bruises, even as Ames forgot his wound.

With shovels, mattocks, buckets,

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boxes of dynamite, the high-booted and Mackinawed lumberjacks swarmed ant-like. More, ever more jostled in an attacking horde. An army, they rushed and crowded—unreal figures as of fire-gnomes or slaves of Vulcan in that lurid crimson glare.

"Come a-runnin', fellas! Hop to it!"

Small need to cry them on! Their jobs depended on saving the forest! With furious zeal they assaulted their enemy. And yells began sounding from the other way. Another horde, from camps to southward, was likewise deploying into battle.

"Dey comin' from all to hell an' gone!" panted a huge Polack, blundering toward Ames. "I see de glare from Number Eight Tower. Phoned headquarters, an'—"

"Gangs comin' up the railroad on trains, too," broke in a sweat-bathed Celt. "Ye'll have a t'ousand here now, in no time. But how—?"

"Here, you!" commanded Dutchy. "Take a gang an' beat it down Seebeck River! You, Callahan—a couple dozen men, an' hit for Lake Alfelden. An' you—an' you—"

Now that the fire-boss had a growing army, his tactics surged into play. Swiftly he planned strategy.

"You, Wannup, hold her from spreadin' east along the railroad!" Like a Titan, he gestured in the glare. "You, there, Gaudreau, run in a gang along Blaze 46! An' you—"

"Hey, Dutchy!" shouted a grimy-faced fellow. "I seen that Hilliard gal—the stenoggapher as was lost, an' all hell couldn't find. She was at Camp Nine, an—"

"Never mind girls!" the fire-boss roared back at him. "Get in that Gaudreau gang—get goin'!"

"But, Dutchy, listen! She said she was comin' out here, arfter she got a bit rested. She was phonin'. Where the divil an' all did she come from, an' how the—"

The question was sundered by a harsh bellow:

"Holy sufferin' saints! You—*you* here?"

IT was the voice of Constable Buck O'Hara.

In that shifting weave of faces all about, Ames by the fiery glow now suddenly beheld the Law looming up ahead of him.

Sweating and very much dishevelled, O'Hara in this crimson glare looked an even larger and angrier Irishman than ever. He stared with wide eyes of amazement, rage and menace. Fists clenched, he furiously demanded:

"How the divil did *ye* get here, then? Faith, an' didn't I see ye layin' in y'r bunk at the jail, just afore I started? Come here to me now, ye bomb-throwin' son of a anarkis!"

Dutchy struck off the constable's hand, just as it fell on Ames's shoulder.

"Lay off, you thick-headed bog-trotter!" commanded the fire-boss. "This fella's okay. I'll guarantee him!"

"The divil ye will, then!" blustered O'Hara. "An' him under arrest, an' held fer trial in—"

"Dry up, Shamrock! There's been a new deal, all round, an' things has changed a lot. There's the birds *you* want!" Dutchy jerked a thumb at the wretched Siamese-twin pair. "We got the goods on 'em, plenty. 'Twas them as planted that there bomb, savvy?"

"No!"

"Well, I say *yes!* We had one hell of a scrap with 'em, but—"

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"Ye say, then—?"

"I say, take 'em, an' get out o' here, Galway! An'—aw, what's the use? No time now to tell you. We got tons of evidence against 'em. An' I got a fire on my hands now, so get to blazes out o' here!"

As Buck O'Hara scratched a slowly-comprehending head, and turned from Ames to his new prey, already Dutchy's orders were once more vigorously echoing:

"You, Laplante, run twenty men down Tote-road Five! Jandron, with a dozen, in past Cache Eight. Bill Eagan, you hold the Beaver Brook line—"

"Hey, where do *I* fit?" demanded Ames. "All these gangs going out. Which one for mine?"

"Lord, man! Ain't you had enough fer one night?"

"Forget that 'enough' stuff! Which gang?"

"Well—Eagan's!"

Ames snatched a shovel and stumbled after Eagan's fast-forming crew.

But he had hardly gone a hundred yards in that smoke-thickened, crimson glare flooding the corduroy road, when he hauled to a sudden stand.

In that road, before him, he saw the girl once more.

"WELL, by Gad!" he demanded. "Is that you again?"

"Why not?" Eve tartly made answer. She was panting a little, and perspiration gleamed on her damp forehead, where the hair had curled into very fetching ringlets. "I suppose I've got as much right to be here as you have, eh? Not your own copyrighted fire, is it?"

"Oh, say—you know what I mean. After what you've been through—"

"I ought to toddle off to bed, eh? Guess again, Mr. American. And now we're getting personal, *how* did you get out of jail, and—?"

"Say, forget all that. Time enough for it later. I've got a job on my hands just now—Eagan's gang. See you later!"

"Oh, you will, eh? Going to leave me standing here like a dummy? I guess not!" Her eyes flashed indignation. "If you can fight fire, I guess I can, too!"

Ames laughed. It seemed to him he hadn't laughed for centuries.

"While you're fighting it, look out you don't set more, with that temper of yours!" he jested. "Here, come along!"

He picked up a mattock somebody had dropped, and thrust it into her hands. What a picture she made, with the firelight dancing on her face, glinting in her hair, her eager and indignant eyes!

But as she took the mattock, those eyes lost their resentment, and grew anxious.

"Look!" she exclaimed. "Your hand—it's all blood!"

"Huh, that? Only a scratch!"

"More than a scratch, boy. And you got it—saving me!"

"Well, what if I did? It's fifty-fifty, I reckon," he laughed. "If you hadn't whammed Marcotte with that club, just in the nick o' time, where would *I* have been?"

At that, she laughed too.

"Come on!" she cried. "Let's go!"

With mattock and shovel they set off together along the corduroy road. Together, toward the battle that still confronted them, they started their long trek through forest night glorified by fire-glow ruddy as a Northland dawn.

THE END.

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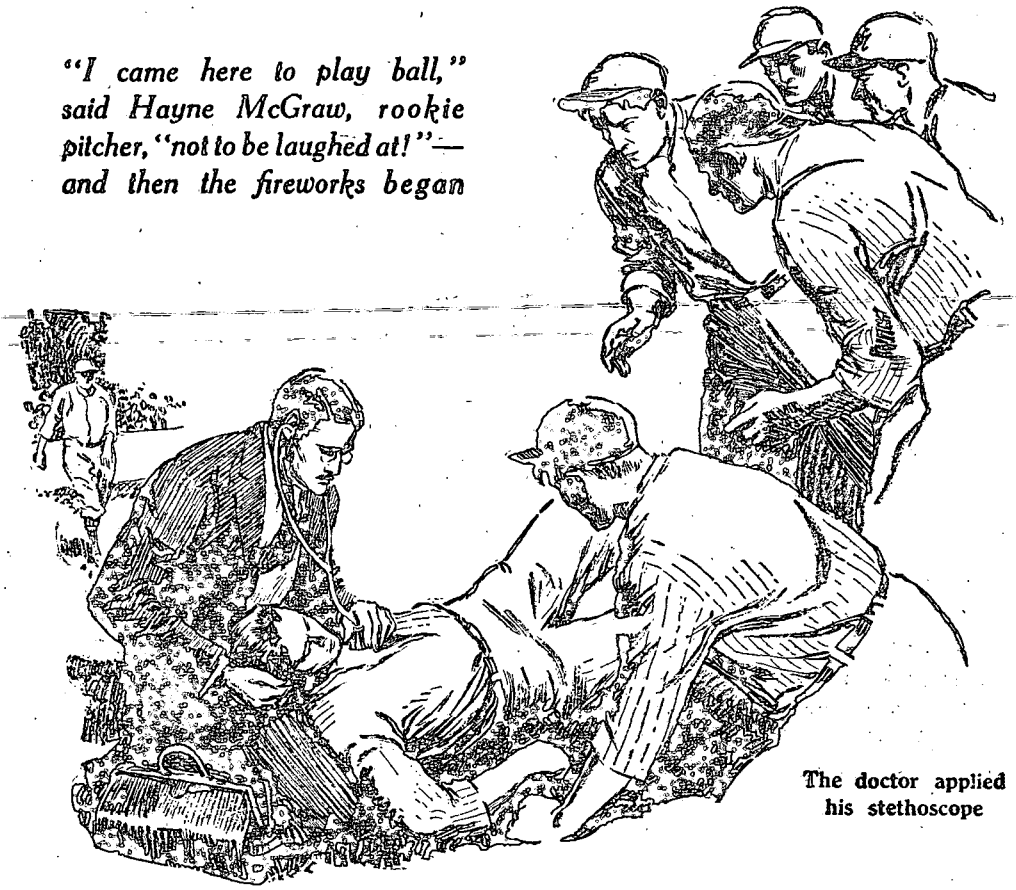
Good-by Pennant

By JOHN A. THOMPSON

"I came here to play ball," said Hayne McGraw, rookie pitcher, "not to be laughed at!"— and then the fireworks began



The doctor applied his stethoscope

CONVERSATION and the rasp of spiked shoes on a concrete floor filled the dressing-room as a group of the Ravens hustled into new spring uniforms. A first string pitcher twisted the peak of his cap over his right ear, and jerked it down.

"Some write-up the papers gave that rookie."

"Hayne McGraw?" Jimmy Dolan laughed. Jimmy was manager of the Ravens. "He'll eat it up, and never know they're kidding him."

"Maybe," put in Beef Jones, middle pasture guardian. "Them Arkansas hill billies ain't all so dumb. Some of them are mighty touchy. Kinda raw about sayin' he was raised on catfish heads and squirrel meat."

"Aw," snapped Jimmy, "the kid comes from so far in the backwoods, they use owls for roosters."

"Yeah, maybe his breath smells like cordwood, but I heard he played before the King of Siam," interrupted Sorrowful Hank Williams solemnly.

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"Huh?" Jimmy turned sharply to the first baseman.

"Sure," drawled Sorrowful, "before the King of Siam came to this country."

The laughter that greeted Hank's wisecrack had hardly died down when the door opened and Hayne McGraw walked in. Obviously the lanky, lean-jawed, almost skinny youngster had something on his mind. Without a word to any of the older players he walked straight to Jimmy Dolan.

"Did you-all give the papers that bio-graphical data I been readin'?" he asked.

"Sure. Swell publicity, kid." Jimmy grinned. One or two of the others snickered.

"Do yuh mind steppin' over here a minute, Mister Dolan? I got somethin' personal to tell you." There was a dangerous, cold light in Hayne's dark brown eyes. His whole manner had created a sudden tension in the dressing-room.

Jimmy stepped over a bench, and clear of a row of steel lockers.

"I came here to play ball," said Hayne quietly. "Fun is fun, but I don't appreciate bein' laughed at about where I was borned and raised. It don't set."

Jimmy was still smiling. Quick as he was to raise his arms, he was several seconds too slow. Swift as the leap of a bobcat, Hayne's right fist shot forward. It caught the short, stocky manager flush on the chin with all the force of a pile-driver gone wild. Jimmy struck the floor on the flat of his back. Gasping, Beef Jones and the rest crowded around in a circle.

Dolan scrambled to his feet, fists knotted, face red with rage. Hayne was standing over him, trembling, taut. But [illegible] his arms to his sides. [illegible]y's tongue. He curbed it, and with it, his sudden flare of temper.

After all, Hayne had been right. It was a rough story the papers printed. Jimmy hadn't been thinking of the rookie's feelings when he gave it to the news hounds. Now, in spite of himself, he admired the loyalty Hayne had shown towards his simple backwoods home. The boy had fought for it, risked his job for it. Slowly Dolan opened his palms. He thrust his right hand forward, rubbed his aching jaw with his left.

"You win, kid," he said.

Amazed, Hayne took the outstretched hand in his. Dolan turned to the bunch, smiling.

"Wow! Can I take it? Gosh, I thought a mule kicked me." Then he snapped into his professional manner. The incident was closed. "Let's go!"

The crowd rushed for the door, shouted calls masking their surprise. Dolan and Hayne walked out together. Emotion stifled the words that choked in the rookie's throat.

"I . . . I'd like to apologize, Mr. Dolan," he managed to stammer.

"Forget it," barked Jimmy. "Get out there and show your stuff. We open against the Tigers to-morrow. That's all you've got to keep in mind."

For a moment their eyes met, registered an understanding that did not need to be voiced in mere words. Jimmy Dolan, veteran of a score of baseball seasons, yet still wise in the ways of youngsters, and Hayne McGraw youngest rookie on the team, were friends.

JIMMY didn't start Hayne in against the Tigers on the opening day. Jimmy didn't start him for a long time after that either, though he knew how Hayne was chafing to get in-

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to a game. Keeping the kid on the bench was just a quiet way of punishing him for that crack on the chin, and of teaching him discipline.

It irked Hayne to sit on the sidelines. But he took it like a good soldier. Not once did he complain to Dolan, or to his teammates. Finally when he had held the bench down so long he thought he would bust if he had to sit through another inning, his chance came.

It was in the fifth inning of a game that was lost anyhow. The word to go in and "hold 'em" was like a prison pardon to Hayne. The slim mountaineer warmed up like an airplane motor primed for a cross-continent record. He looked tall as the pines in his native Ozarks and twice as cool as he dug his toes into the dirt in the pitcher's box.

Fat Meehan, his battery mate, grinning and chattering like a moon-faced baboon simply held his glove open, and never had to move it. Wind up, wham, plunk! Wind up, wham, plunk! Every one a strike.

They cut the plate at all angles, and with speed to burn. Not a "groover" in the bunch. Hayne had the opposition guessing, as it backed into the water bucket and watched the good ones go by.

There were three men on bases when McGraw went in. He struck out the first two batters with six pitched balls. The bleachers began to sit up and take aud, vocal notice. The next man up obbed sand on his hands, smacked the ess dirt off on the seat of his pants, stepped up to the plate and took a wicked swing.

He managed to chop the tomato, and sent it twisting down the third base line, red-hot. A mean ball to field. Hayne never hesitated. He was over and on it like a hawk. His long arm snaked the ball out of the air. He reached down and tagged the man streaking for home. Then with the same motion whipped the ball to Sorrowful at first.

"Just to make sure, Mister Dolan," he explained to Jimmy afterward.

After that not a man touched the ball. Not a walk. Not a foul. All clean strike-outs. That was Hayne's first game with the Ravens and he lost it. But only because his team was four runs behind when he went into the box.

From then on Hayne became increasingly important in the plans Jimmy fostered at the evening classes he held with the help of a blackboard and a lot of chunks of colored chalk.

"There's two ways to make runs," Jimmy told them one night. "Getting up at the bat and trying to kill the pill, which calls for a lot of Babe Ruths, and if there's any blushing Bambinos on this team, they can stand up and take a nice bow. They ain't ever announced it to me before. The other way to make runs is to get the first man on. When he's on, push him around the circuit . . . a sack at a time.

"Safest weapon to get on with is a bunt. All you eggs can lay the short ones down the base lines. What I mean are the shots where you don't pull but meet the ball. Find out who's covering, short or second, and poke the apple in the direction of the hole."

Thus Jimmy analyzed his team and propounded his methods. Hayne McGraw was always his most attentive listener. Sometimes Jimmy would delve into the tactics of opposing teams.

"All right," he'd say. "We're playing the Wasps. Jake Collins, their heavy slugger is up. The catcher signals a straight fast one from [illegible] Where are you [illegible]

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Then it was up to Beef to rise with his little piece of yellow chalk and make a mark on the board, way out in what represented deep center field. Jimmy would continue, making the rest of the players mark their exact positions. Play after play, man after man, he drilled them.

THE Ravens were not the worst team in their league by a long shot. But they had a disconcerting habit of closing the season as also-rans. Near the top generally, pennant contenders sometimes, but never pennant winners. If young Hayne McGraw developed, Jimmy told himself, and didn't blow up in the middle of the season, the Ravens had a good chance to snatch that coveted flag that was Jimmy's greatest ambition.

Jimmy decided to give Hayne a real test. He started the rookie in the opening game of their first series with the Wasps, pennant winners of the previous year. Hayne was in good form, alert as a coiled spring, and yet not over-anxious.

In the first stanza Hayne cut down the opposing batting order, one-two-three, with twelve tosses, nine strikes and three balls. In the Ravens' half, Beef Jones came up first, fouled a couple and finally reached bag number one. Sorrowful bunted a slow roller down the third sack line. Beef crossed second, got his signal and pounded around to third which was open as a barn door. Sorrowful bluffed a steal, and the ball went to the pitcher.

Next pitched ball Sorrowful went down in earnest, making second safe on a belly slide. Beef hugged third. Fat Meehan came up to the plate. Three balls on him. The next had to be good. He watched the Wasp fielders edging back towards the fence, and gave Beef a broad wink. Beef wasn't twenty feet away, and Sorrowful had already passed third when Fat connected . . . a perfect slow one towards first. Meehan was tagged at the initial sack, but Beef and Sorrowful thundered over the home plate, plenty early, plenty safe.

The inning ended with the Ravens three runs to the good and the only ball knocked out of the infield had been a fluke pop fly by Sorrowful to left center just behind the base lines. The Wasp second sackman ran back and speared it for a put-out.

The rest of the game tightened into a pitcher's battle with the Wasps trying desperately to cut down the Ravens' early lead. They couldn't do it. Hayne allowed only two hits the whole game. Jake Collins chopped himself a two-bagger but was unable to score before the inning was over. A Wasp player named Kolowitz drew a clean single in the eighth, and was tagged attempting to steal second.

"Nice game, Hayne," said Jimmy when the rookie came off the field.

"Nice hell!" shouted Fat Meehan. "It was darn near perfect!"

"Aw, shut up," snapped Jimmy. He turned and walked away quickly, afraid that if he lingered he would let go of himself and slap the youngster on the back and tell him he was good, great, grand! Jimmy didn't believe in giving ball players, particularly new and young ones, an opportunity to develop a swelled head.

Another pitcher like McGraw, Jimmy realized, and the Ravens would have the pennant more or less in the bag. Characteristically, and because he always remembered that every silver lining has its cloud, the Ravens' manager wondered how long he would be able to keep Hayne before some big

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league scout snatched the Arkansas twirler away from him.

DOLAN worked Hayne hard and often after that first Wasp game. The team began to count on the youngster as their surest game winner. What he had on the ball was just too bad . . . for the other fellow. Fat Meehan was first to notice the strain was telling on Hayne. With his usual bluntness, he took Jimmy aside one afternoon.

"You kin ride a good horse to death," he said gravely. "Jim, don't you think you're playin' McGraw too often?"

"I'm running this team," snapped Jimmy curtly. In his heart he knew there was a lot of truth in what Fat had said. "Anyhow, if some of these other brittle-armed coconut tossers could win a game once . . ."

"You mean Sullivan, and Makey, and Goertz. They ain't bad ball pitchers."

"Sure," exploded Jimmy. "They ain't bad . . . and they ain't real good. Mug, I'm tired of a team that just 'ain't bad.' I want a nine that'll clean up everything in the league. With Hayne McGraw pitching, I've got it . . ."

"Go ahead . . . burn the kid out. Ruin a guy that's goin' to be a better ball player than you or me ever have been, or could be, for a few lousy games in a third rate league. Nice guy, Jim . . . you and Simon Legree."

Fat picked up a catcher's mask from the bench beside him and hurled it vehemently across the locker room.

"When I want advice, I'll ask for it," rasped Jimmy as he walked away.

Still Jimmy made a mental reservation to go easier on Hayne. But in spite of his resolutions every time the Ravens faced avertible defeat, immediate victory seemed terribly important. And it was easy to send the kid in to save the day. Besides, Hayne was so willing, always ready, always eager. He didn't seem to know that such a thing as playing too much ball was possible.

As Fat predicted, the pay-off came. Suddenly. And Hayne was high-pressured into a burn-out. No human could have stood the gruelling pitching pace Hayne had been going.

Hayne pitched a double-header against the Rangers. The Ravens won the first game, two to zero. The second was a three-three tie that dragged into extra innings. The old bunt and Beef's sacrifice scored Meehan in the twelfth and ended the long moratorium.

Next morning Jimmy walked into McGraw's hotel bedroom before breakfast. The kid was in bed, flushed with fever, his right arm limp at his side like a dead thing. Jimmy got a shock, a nasty twinge of conscience. He tried to tell Hayne he was sorry, that it had been his fault.

Hayne laughed rather weakly. Nothing serious, he maintained. A day or two and the right flipper would be working again, better than ever.

THAT afternoon the Ravens played their final session of a five game set with the Rangers. Hayne sat on the bench in uniform, a blanket thrown round his sagging shoulders. He should have been home in bed. But a team of elephants couldn't have held him there. Not with the series tied at two games apiece.

Goertz started tossing them for the Ravens. He got by in the first inning with the team playing their best ball

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for the sick boy over on the players' bench. In the second and third Ranger hitters put the Indian sign on everything Goertz sent over. They slaughtered him, but he was lucky. Double plays and a Ranger batsman who fanned at three wild ones saved him.

In the fourth Goertz got panicky. A pair of neat singles and a pass on balls filled the bases. Instinctively Jimmy Dolan waved him out of the box. Then Jimmy looked around for something he didn't have; another pitcher besides McGraw who could hold down the Ranger hitters.

Hayne saw him, knew what he was doing, what he was thinking. Off came the kid's blanket. He stood up. Jimmy hesitated.

"How you feelin', kid? Think the old arm'll stand an inning or two?"

"Feelin' great!" lied Hayne. He weaved out to the box, glass-eyed. When the stands caught on to who was coming in to plug the dike, they stood on their feet and yelled their heads off. Something welled up in Hayne's throat after that ovation. He had to stick.

Hayne tried to warm up, pain twisting his face as he brought his creaky right arm around. The batter took a toehold, gripped his mace in the right place, swung hard at the first one . . . and missed it a mile. He got set again. The ball came along, big as a grapefruit and slow as Aunt Hetty's new beau. The batter nearly swung himself on his face slapping at that one. Hayne's third ball floated in even slower than the others, weaving like a drunk. The batter chopped under it, neatly, sweetly. Then he flung his bat away and cursed.

Next man up was a peppery little Italian. Santelli. He choked his club, took a short step forward and connected.

Wham! A hot liner straight over the pitcher's head. Almost as soon as the bat cracked Hayne jumped. Sunlight flashed below his feet. He seemed to hang in the air for a second, gloved hand upstretched. *Clunk!* The ball smacked into the glove, dead center. Then as Hayne dropped to the ground, it shot out like a bullet towards Red Finn at third for a double put-out.

SHOUTING, yelling with glee, the Ravens started their half of the stanza with murder in their hearts and blood in their eyes. They clouted White of the Rangers for three scores. Hayne stayed in for the Ravens. He kept feeding tricky wabblers to Fat Meehan behind the plate. Now and then a Ranger straightened one out, but not often. The ninth opened with the Ravens one run in the lead. The famous Ranger steam-roller, Dorgan-Phloxx-and Howard was up, and in just that order.

Meehan went out and put his arm around Hayne. "Okay, kid?" He tried to grin. "Won't be long now." He slapped Hayne affectionately and waddled back to his position.

Hayne, white as a ghost, the fever sweat trickling down his lean face, set his lips grimly together. No more wabblers, he determined. Couldn't risk them. Game was his now if . . . if he could hold those bat-swinging menaces at home plate hitless.

Wind up, wham, plunk! Strike one. Wind up, wham, plunk! Everything he had behind that one. Strike two. Wind up . . . Lord, his arm hurt . . . wham, plunk! Strike three. One man down. Two more to go. Just two men.

Somehow Hayne managed to pitch seven more burners over the plate, six of them strikes. The ball park was bed-

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lam let loose. The din seemed far away to Hayne. He stood in the pitcher's box dazed, a meaningless grin on his face. Black spots danced before his eyes. He swayed crazily. Then his knees gave way, and he crashed to the turf like a falling spruce.

Meehan rushed towards him. Jimmy dashed out onto the field. And a doctor came along with his little black bag, efficiently elbowing his way through the group of players huddled aghast around the unconscious youth in the center of the diamond.

The doctor ripped open Hayne's shirt, applied his stethoscope. Then he lifted his head and issued a brisk order. A few seconds later an ambulance clanged onto the field. Strong hands lifted Hayne gently into the ambulance. The doctor climbed aboard.

B e w i l d e r e d, Jimmy looked on. "Good-by, pennant!" he muttered hoarsely.

Fat Meehan wheeled towards him. "Pennant! That's all you think of. A hunk of rag, and the kid maybe dyin'." Scorn added to the venom of his words. Contempt blazed in his eyes.

For a moment Jimmy just stood there, shell-shocked. Suddenly he moved. "Hey, doc!" he shouted. "Wait for me! I'm coming, too."

THE Ravens took Hayne home with them next day, but it was two weeks before he was out of the local hospital. Two weeks that were strange and irksome to Hayne, and torture to Jimmy. Hayne McGraw was done as a ball player. The doctors left it up to Jimmy to tell him so.

Even the high-priced specialist shook his head sadly. "It's no use. The old soupbone is gone completely. The boy's finished."

Besides Jimmy, Hayne had another regular visitor at the hospital, a Raven fan who had seen every game the kid pitched on the home lot and most of his out-of-town ones. Val Higgins had taken a real liking to Hayne from the start. Val was a prospector.

"I'm goin' back to Idaho," he told Hayne while the kid was still in the hospital. "Any time you decide to quit ball-playin' I'd sure like for you to come out there. I need me a good partner."

Hayne laughed. "Thanks. But I'll never quit baseball. Reckon I'd curl up and die, if I had to."

"Sure," said Val. "But if you ever change your mind. Don't forget my offer."

Jimmy waited until Hayne's last day in the hospital to tell him the specialist's verdict. The kid was all dressed, suitcase packed and ready to go. He was anxious to get back in the ball park and limber up the arm that was still stiff, and sore, and swollen. There was moisture in Jimmy's eyes as he explained. Moisture that he tried to hide but was not ashamed of.

"It was all my fault, kid. I burned you out."

"Then I . . . I'm t h r o u g h for good?" Hayne stared dully at Jimmy.

"Gee, no," cut in Jimmy quickly, frightened by the look that had crept into Hayne's eyes. "That is," he added weakly, "you ain't through with the Ravens. We want you to stick. There's lots you can do. Help with the blackboard classes and the bookkeeping and all . . ."

Hayne's h a n d trembled as he reached for the doorknob. "Well, anyhow, let's get out of here, Mr. Dolan. The smell of hospitals makes me sick."

Jimmy picked up Hayne's suitcase and moved towards the door. "Gee,

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I've told you everything. It was my fault. And you ain't mad at me? Maybe you don't realize . . ."

"I know I'll probably never play ball again, if that's what you mean," snapped Hayne. He led the way to Jimmy's waiting car.

Several hours later, Jimmy walked alone into his office beneath the grandstand at Raven Park and slammed the door after him. He slung his hat viciously at a hook behind the door. Fat Meehan was sitting at his desk, waiting.

"Where's the kid?" demanded Fat.

"He wouldn't stay. I been ridin' him around tryin' to get him to change his mind. He insists he ain't never took charity off nobody yet and he couldn't figure an inside job with the Ravens no other way."

"Yeah. What's he goin' to do?"

"Says he's goin' prospectin' with a fan named Val Higgins who came to see him at the hospital a lot."

VAL HIGGINS'S cosy hand-hewn log cabin stood far up Tanbark Cañon in a level clearing cut from the fragrant green forest of pine and spruce and tamarack. Inside it, Hayne McGraw stood over the cook stove stirring a pot of red kidney beans.

He was a far different Hayne from the gangling, half-sick youngster who had arrived in the Idaho Panhandle a month before. Mountain air and good camp cooking had filled out his chest. There was color in his cheeks. He looked older. The effect of age and maturity was increased by the red beard that straggled over his face.

The beard was a joke. Val had one —a black one. This time, said Val when he came to the goldfields, he wasn't going to shave until he made his fortune in dust and nuggets. Hayne decided a grow a beard too. To prevent either partner from backing out of the agreement, the men posted a thousand dollar forfeit each, the money to be collected by the other in the event that either of them touched a razor to his chin before he had a hundred thousand dollars to his credit in the bank at Tanbark.

Hayne reached for a stack of tin plates from a shelf over the stove and began setting the supper table. The door opened and Val burst in, his face aglow with excitement.

"We're rich!" he shouted. "Rich as all-git-out! Kid, you sure brung luck with you. Where you keepin' them horseshoes and rabbits' foots? You know that gravel bar on North fork of Eagle Creek you suggested prospectin'? It's lousy with gold . . . coarse gold. Look!" He dug deep in his trousers pocket and scattered a fistful of yellow dust over the oilcloth table cover. "Struck the pay streak first thing this morning. Staked us out a placer claim and hot-footed into the recorder's office."

In amazement Hayne stared at the glittering gold on the table.

"There's half a million dollars, if there's an ounce. We'll split fifty-fifty," went on Val.

"Phew!" Hayne whistled. Then he remembered his bad arm. "Tough that I ain't much help with a shovel."

Val laughed. "Shovel! Kid, we're operators. Hot-shot operators. When I was in town I seen about gettin' some sluice boxes made, and buyin' some new Hungarian riffles and hirin' about ten men to come out and do the diggin'. We'll boss. I gotta go up to the claim to-night and figure out how best to turn the steam and where to run a water ditch to the sluice boxes."

"But, Val," protested Hayne,

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"you're doing most of the work. I don't know a thing about mining. It don't seem fair to take half . . ."

"Aw, shut up, and pass them beans," snapped Val. "It was you suggested prospectin' that bar. We're partners, ain't we?"

"And another thing." Val gulped his third cup of coffee at the conclusion of his meal. "I figured we ought to celebrate with a real swell feed. There's a fellow at Tanbark got a car. I'm sendin' him down to Spokane in the mornin' for a load of fancy store vittles. Anything you want brought out special? I got turkey and pie and oysters and stuff on the list."

Hayne thought a moment. "Yeah," he said slowly. "Six dozen baseballs."

"Huh!" Val was startled. "Okay, partner. But you got queer ideas for a millionaire. Figured maybe you'd forget baseball now."

"Guess I can't, Val. When a fellow's nuts about it like I am, it becomes part of you . . . like your heart or your lungs or something."

WHEN Val's messenger returned from Spokane he brought the stuff up from Tanbark by pack mule. Hayne helped him unload, watched him depart down the trail with his mule, and then dashed into the cabin. Val was away at the claim. Hayne had stayed home to prepare the celebration dinner.

He snatched a blanket from his bunk. Then with a stick and some lard he marked off a white square in the center of the gray blanket. He found some rope. Taking blanket and rope he went out. In a few minutes he had rigged up the blanket between two pines.

Hayne hurried back to the cabin and came out with an armful of baseballs. He measured his distance from the blanket. Eagerly he wound up. Wham . . . kerflop! Hayne's heart sank. A dozen more tries and he knew it was no use. The arm was definitely shot. He couldn't even put over a slow one.

Without heart or appetite he tackled the business of preparing supper. Val came in early, hungry as a horse, jubilant. Preliminary prospect pits sunk in the gravel and initial tests indicated that the ground would prove richer than he had anticipated at first. In a dull monotone Hayne told him about his attempt at a comeback.

"Shucks." Val put his arm around the boy's shoulder. "Don't take it so hard. You'll have enough mazuma to buy the Ravens before the season is over."

Hayne laughed. He sat down at the table. Unconsciously he picked up his knife with his left hand. For a moment he stared at it. His mind flashed back to his kid days in the Arkansas backwoods. His ma had been forever correcting him for that . . . for using his left hand. He seemed to do it without thinking. Suddenly something clicked in his brain. He pushed his chair from the table.

"I'll be back," he shouted, as he grabbed for some baseballs and rushed for the door. It was bright twilight outside. The blanket was still hanging up. Hayne gripped a ball in his left hand. Wind up, wham, plunk! A little wild, but he hit the blanket. And the ball had been delivered with plenty of pepper behind it.

He made another attempt, and another, getting better control all the time. He was excited, his face flushed. He barely heard Val shout from the cabin that his food was getting cold. Only when growing darkness obscured

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the marks on the blanket did he return. He was surprised at how hungry he felt. Val was struggling to finish a fourth slab of pie.

"What a dumb-bell I've been!" declared Hayne. "Bet I been a natural fork-hander pitcher all the time. A little practice and I'll be back as good as ever . . . only left-handed." He paused. "Any ball players in Tanbark that you know of, Val?"

Val fidgeted uneasily in his seat. "I, er, I used to catch for St. Louis back when handle-bar mustaches and side-burns was all the rage in sports wear. But . . . well, I long ago figured my baseball days were over."

"The hell they are!" exclaimed Hayne. "You're goin' to catch for me till I get this south flipper under control."

Val smiled. "I'll do me best, kid."

FAT MEEHAN thumped hard at the pocket in his catcher's mitt as he sat on the players' bench in Raven Park. Jimmy Dolan squatted on his toes, Indian fashion, on the turf in front of him and nervously plucked up short handfuls of grass.

"There she goes," snapped Jimmy gloomily. "Sullivan and Goertz no good, and now Makey blows up on us. Whyinell can't the Ravens get a good pitcher and hang onto him?"

"You had a good one," said Fat slowly. "And you burned him out."

"Yeah. Well don't remind me of it now. I ain't got him to-day."

Jimmy was in a tough spot. The Ravens hadn't done badly throughout the season. They were near the top. But . . . and it was a big but . . . Jimmy had to lick the Rangers in the present game to entitle him to fight the first-place Tigers later in the final pennant series. The worst of it was the Ravens could probably take the flag away from the Tigers . . . if they got the chance.

Meantime in the crucial game Ranger sluggers were doing unmerciful things to Jimmy's onion tossers. Makey, Jimmy's last hope to stop the rising tide of Ranger wallops, could not hold the opposing batters. He did not have enough on the ball. Already the score stood at four to a goose egg against Jimmy's team. The fifth inning was closing with the Ravens up.

Fat Meehan turned as a tall, well-filled-out husky with a flaming red beard and a hat pulled over his brows approached the bench.

"Need any good ball players to-day?" The stranger spoke as if he had marbles in his mouth.

"We got good ball players," snapped Fat. "G'wan back to the house of David, pop."

Jimmy looked up out of the corner of his eye. "Yeah, and we don't use rubes, or circus freaks. Beat it! We're in conference."

Again the flannel-mouth spoke. "Here's a hundred bucks says I'm a good pitcher." The bearded one dipped into his pocket and a hundred-dollar yellowback floated to the ground.

Jimmy picked it up, glanced around. The stranger's back was turned. He was taking off his coat. "Aw, hell," said Jimmy. "I hate to take a sucker's money. Catch a couple for him, Fat. Then chase him."

At the stranger's first pitched ball, Jimmy instantly became alert. At the seventh, he jumped up and shouted, "Scram for the locker room, rube! Get into a uniform. Anything you find that fits. We'll talk turkey later." The stranger streaked for the lockers.

Fat came back to Jimmy. "Boy, can that baby burn them across? For a minute I thought . . ."

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"Yeah. Me, too. But this guy is a lot stouter than the kid was, and he's a southpaw. McGraw was a right-hander."

A high Raven pop foul that the Ranger first bagger ran in and snared easily ended the inning.

"Send somebody for that rube with the whiskers!" yelled Jimmy. "The panic is on anyhow. Might as well make it a circus."

The stranger came from the runway beneath the grandstand and walked straight to the pitcher's box.

"Hey, what's your name?" shouted Jimmy. "I gotta tell the announcer."

"Smith," called back the stranger.

"Which one, Trade or Mark?"

THE stranger set his feet in the pitcher's box. The Ravens paid little attention to the newcomer until he retired the first three overconfident Ranger batters with ten pitched balls. The bleachers screamed. The Ravens threw down their gloves and danced around them.

Dorgan, the last Ranger hitter who had fanned, walked over to his manager.

"What are they trying to do?" he grumbled. "Ring in a busted big leaguer under the alfalfa?"

"Pipe down," growled the Ranger mentor. "We'll investigate that afterwards . . . if we have to. We got the game in the bag right now. And next time you step to the plate, play ball. You don't look like no lily wavin' in the breeze."

Under the magnetic stimulus of the new pitcher the Ravens picked up. They managed to score two runs in the seventh. The stranger held the Rangers down tight. Neither side scored in the eighth. The ninth opened with the Rangers two runs in the lead.

In the first half of the ninth the whiskered pitcher cut down his first man with three sizzlers that seemed to beat the speed of light by a million miles a second. The next Ranger advanced to the plate, tapped his bat on it twice for luck and swung at the first ball pitched him. He connected for a clean single, and looked surprised. The Rangers cheered. They had the stranger's number. Third man up was Santelli. He also whammed the pill for a safe hit.

"Yah!" muttered Jimmy. "Another flash in the pan. That guy's the same as the rest of them. Great . . . for three innings. Then, blooey!"

The stranger pitched his next ball. Wham! Sommers, Ranger catcher, smacked it hard down the grass in front of the pitcher. It looked like a safe knock. The stranger hurled himself at the bouncing sphere. He slid on his ear trying to stop it . . . and succeeded. From the dirt he flipped the pill into the Raven second sacker's reaching hands. Second cannonballed it to Sorrowful at first, and nailed Sommers by a half step, for a double put-out. The twin play cramped the Rangers outburst, and retired them for good, with a two run surplus.

The Ravens had a half inning in which to do something, or lose their chance to meet the Tigers in the final pennant games. The Ranger pitcher struck out their first two men up. Not so good. Then a base on balls, a safe steal to second, and a clean hit that gave the man on second a chance to make third sent the Raven hopes soaring.

Grandstand and bleachers were in an uproar. Fans who a few seconds before had been shifting nervously in their seats, getting ready to go home, now found their eyes glued on the

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tense players out on the green diamond.

"Holy cats!" exclaimed Jimmy. "That circus freak is up. Can he hit?"

Jimmy was on the point of using a pinch hitter in the crisis. Fat Meehan grabbed his arm. "You played a hunch lettin' the billy goat pitch. Play another. Let him bunt, or sacrifice."

Jimmy shrugged. The stranger was already facing the pitcher.

THE first ball cut the sack close to the stranger. He pulled in his stomach and let it go by with a grin. He gripped his bat tighter. Only he knew that all his hitting strength was in his left arm, that his right hand merely followed the motion through when he swung. He let the next two pass. A frown clouded his face as the umpire called them both strikes. The bleachers howled. A few empty pop bottles landed at the umpire's feet.

Jimmy clutched Fat Meehan. "Cripes! The sap's goin' to swing on the next one . . ."

Wham! The stranger swung . . . and he connected. A long hit. Out—far out it sailed in a swift arc that landed high up in the right field bleachers. Round the bases raced the stranger, driving in the two runners ahead of him. His right arm throbbed with pain from the nerve-shattering impact of that terrific clout. He crossed the plate for the winning run in a terrific din of cheers.

"Get into my office," shouted Jimmy hysterically. "Whiskers, you and me are goin' to talk business."

The stranger hurried after Jimmy and Fat Meehan down the dark passageway beneath the concrete stand into Jimmy's office. He could still hear the cheers ringing outside. Sweet music, that. Jimmy pulled out a desk drawer, fumbled in it for a blank contract form. He intended to pre-date it in case the Rangers made a squawk.

"I don't like your terms," snapped the stranger abruptly. "Hanged if I get the proper recognition around this dump. You mugs don't seem to know who I am."

"All right, Napoleon," rasped Jimmy testily. "What are you gettin' so chesty for? I ain't offered you any terms yet."

"Yeah . . . you insignificant, cock-eyed, bandy-legged runt!" The stranger laughed. "Don't you know . . ."

"It's the kid. Hayne McGraw!" shouted Fat. "Knew him all the time." He snatched Hayne's hand, pumped it vigorously.

"See . . . Fat's the same old liar. Things ain't changed a bit." Jimmy rushed from behind the desk and seized Hayne's free hand. "Gee, kid, I'm glad to see you . . . and what a comeback. But why the alfalfa? Dodgin' cops?"

Laughing, Hayne explained the reason for his beard. "But it won't be long now," he concluded. "Got a wire this mornin' sayin' next clean-up we could most likely buy us a razor and mow the whiskers without forfeit."

"Say, Jimmy," cut in Fat. "Remember your saying farewell to the flag on a certain occasion some time ago. Better make it 'Hello Pennant' with Hayne pitchin' against the Tigers for us in the final series."

"And how!" Jimmy thumped Hayne's back. "Listen, kid," he added. "The crowd's still yellin' for you. Better come out and take a bow under your right moniker. Oh baby! Will that knock 'em dead!"

The smile that spread across Hayne's face came straight from the bottom of his heart.

THE END.

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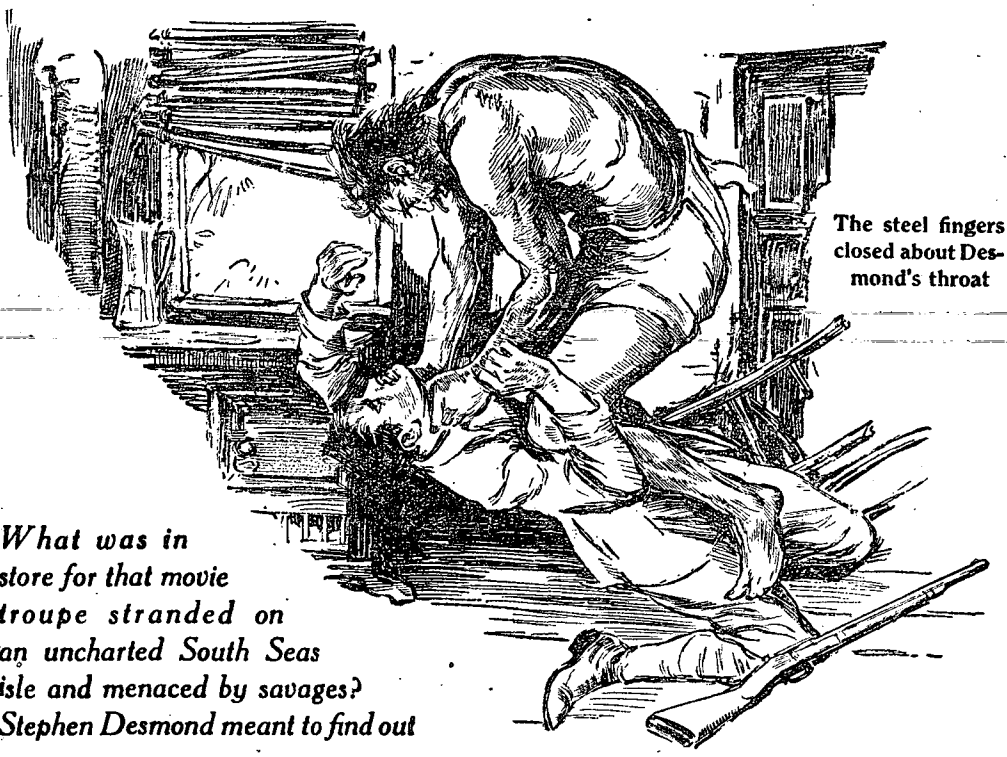
The Unknown Island

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "Power," "The Golden Serpent," etc.



The steel fingers closed about Desmond's throat

What was in store for that movie troupe stranded on an uncharted South Seas isle and menaced by savages? Stephen Desmond meant to find out

THIS STORY HAS JUST BEGUN—START IT NOW.

NO one would have recognized in the drunken beachcomber of Papeete, on the South Seas island of Tahiti, the former dapper Captain Stephen Desmond of the A. E. F. But Desmond had no trouble in recognizing Nick Flake and Jake Gorham, camera men who had served in that same capacity in the Army during the war, and who have now come to the island to work on a film.

Greeting the ex-officer boisterously, they aid him in joining the staff of Mammoth Films in the capacity of guide and interpreter. Desmond, snapping out of his drunkenness, is commissioned by J. Ponsomby Preudholm, the efficient and likeable director, to charter a schooner that will take the company to the distant and little known Isle de Sevennes, where glamorous tropical color can be obtained.

Captain Delire and his schooner, the Belle Parisienne, are obtained by Desmond, who does not like the captain's reputation, but finds that his ship is the best available.

Included in the movie company are Rosa de la Rose, the vivacious Mexican girl; Dora Demerest, beautiful leading

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lady; Raoul Homer, leading man, who rather admires his own talents and good looks, and James Golden and George Kernan, character men.

After two weeks of sailing, Captain Delire cheers his seasick passengers with the news that they will reach the island the next day. He invites Desmond to his cabin to have a drink. When the latter insists upon water, the captain gives it to him, but chuckles at the grimace Desmond makes when he drinks it. The next thing he knows he is lying sprawled on the beach and the schooner is sailing away.

Desmond, roused by the jeers of the thirty or so members of the outfit who accuse him of being drunk, comes to his senses and realizes that he has been drugged. He makes a still more astounding discovery: it is not the Isle de Sevennes upon which the company has been landed. It is an unknown island, inhabited by savages.

Preudholm and Desmond hold a council of war. Desmond had been drugged, they decide, because he was the only one who would have realized the deception. The object of this abandonment must be to demand ransom on Miss Demerest, whose life is insured for a million dollars. The two men keep their theories to themselves—then an attack from the savages throws the group into an uproar.

Rifles and ammunition are hastily unpacked. Desmond tells the story.

CHAPTER VI.

A BULLET FROM THE DARK.

LONG before the sun began to set in the western sky, the new camp was well organized, sentinels posted and everything was ready for our first night upon the unknown island.

The sunset was magnificent and the women exclaimed about it, but I was too accustomed to South Seas sunsets to get excited about it.

I was assigned to share a tent with my friends the camera men. Preudholm had a tent to himself and so did Miss Demerest. Rosa shared quarters with the character woman. Homer rated a solitary tent and the character men were berthed two and two. Each tent contained comfortable cots and wash stands. It was camping de luxe.

Half a dozen camp fires were lighted. That night we dined on stuff out of tins, but I promised Preudholm to organize a fishing expedition for next day

The night was warm but not enervating. At another fire, Rosa was strumming on a guitar. The bunch around the crew's fires were singing "Sweet Adeline." No liquor was displayed which was fortunate because I was yearning for a drink and the first drink, with me, demanded more and more.

At eight o'clock, Jake and I relieved the carpenter and the electrician who were stationed at the head of the point in the darkness. Preudholm had arranged watches but, as yet, had not called upon any of the actors for military duty.

"Steve," said Jake, when the original sentries had hastened back to the camp fires, "you sure are in wrong with the company. Just for repeating the names some of them hams have been calling you would send me up for libel. Homer's the worst. That guy has a suspicious mind. I heard him telling the Demerest girl that he thinks we were dumped here on purpose and you're in on it."

"Does he advance any reason for such an idea?"

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"No, but he says it's all hooey that the ship captain could make a mistake. He told her that no captain could have made his way through them reefs if he didn't know the way in."

"Well," I said bitterly. "You know my condition this morning."

"You fell off with an awful splash," he remarked. "Say, maybe they put something in your hooch. If this was a plot you could have spoiled it, couldn't you?"

"I certainly would have told Preudholm that this was not Sevennes."

"Nick and I were talking it over," he said. "If they landed us on the wrong island on purpose, suppose they don't come back for us."

I affected to laugh. "That will be just too bad."

"Oh, the company in Hollywood will send after us. We're not worried. Are those stars up there?"

He was looking inland and upward and I followed his gaze. High in the hills were lights. I counted a dozen of them in one group.

"Fires," I said. "A big camp, by the looks of it."

"Cannibals, eh?"

"Well, probably not. Savages, of course."

"Those guys we saw were cannibals," he assured me. "I wish I was back in France. I never heard of the Heinies eating anybody."

I laughed. "We'll keep them at bay. They wouldn't dare to attack a strong party armed with rifles."

AS I spoke there was a loud report from the bush, a flash of fire, and I heard a bullet hum by, uncomfortably close.

My rifle was at my shoulder and I was pumping lead at the spot where the flash had appeared. From the camp came a blood-curdling female scream and much shouting. Preudholm was approaching, distinctly outlined by the camp fires.

"Get down," I shouted. "You're a perfect target."

He dropped to the ground and I pulled Jake to the earth. "Stay there," I growled. "Want your head blown off?"

A moment later Preudholm arrived on hands and knees.

"What happened?" he asked tensely.

"Sharpshooter in the bush. I suppose he made us out because we were standing between him and the fires. I returned his fire. May have hit him."

"They've got guns," was Preudholm's comment.

"One rifle, at any rate. It complicates things, doesn't it?"

"What do you make of it?"

I pointed up into the hills. "See those fires? There are a lot of them. I don't know what to make of it except that somebody is not friendly."

Preudholm swore softly under his breath. "I should have made my picture on the far side of Tahiti, I suppose. Except that somebody else would have been chosen to make it. Are they going to attack?"

"Savages usually try surprise. It may have been bravado. They were watching us closely all day and saw our weapons. Perhaps they want to notify us that they have firearms."

"Suppose they rush those fellows on the beach?"

"The shooting must have put them on guard."

"I ought to call them in but I can't risk damage to the machinery."

I considered. "That may be the idea of the shot. Those boys are safe enough among their boxes, but I am afraid they would be cut down if they

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tried to join us. I wouldn't care for the job of going to them in the dark."

"The women are crazy with fear. Listen to that character woman howl. Rosa was screeching when I left. Well, they'll have to get used to the primitive." He chuckled. "I'll go back and have those fires doused. We'll have an entrenched camp by this time to-morrow. Should we post more sentries?"

"Two wide awake men on this neck are enough. And after what's happened nobody will fall asleep on post."

He grasped my hand. "It's good to have a trained man with me," he said. "Look out for yourself."

He disappeared and presently the camp fires went out. There was no moon and the stars gave little light.

"Who in hell fired that gun, do you suppose?" demanded Jake unexpectedly and loudly.

"Be still, you fool. Want them to locate us?" I whispered and then I grabbed his hand and crawled with him to a position a dozen feet in the rear and a dozen paces to the right.

"Lie still and listen," I hissed. "They may be right on top of us."

Hours passed, however, and nothing whatever happened. Finally two ex-soldiers came to relieve us and Jake and I returned to camp. Everybody was sitting on the ground outside the tents, wide awake and talking in low tones. Everybody demanded to know exactly what had happened and Jake told them nothing in several thousand words. I sought my cot and, probably, was the only person who slept that night.

I WOKE soon after sunrise and found most of the company still outside the tents and still fearfully waiting. Rosa de la Rose was among them, sitting with her arm round the neck of the character woman. Dora Demerest was not visible.

The sun came up in scarlet and golden glory and chased away the shadows and displayed the island in all its loveliness. Aside from Preudholm, with his director's eye, I suppose I was the only one who admired it. For the rest, the island had become a fearsome place. On all sides I met unfriendly looks. Even Rosa frowned at me. Her display of friendliness yesterday, probably, was to annoy Homer, the leading man, whom, I had already learned, she hated.

"What's the plan?" asked the director, drawing me apart. "We've a big day ahead of us, of course."

"We must find a stream and camp close to it. Can you move your machinery?"

"Certainly. We've got parts of an automobile in some of the boxes. Take only a short time to put it together."

"There are no roads, you know."

"We anticipated that. It travels like a tractor."

"Pity you haven't a broadcasting outfit. You have everything else."

He laughed. "We would have except that we planned for the island of Tahiti and expected to use a French government station. Our studio plans to communicate with us by radio daily. We'll have a lot of fun listening to their instructions in a few days when they think we are within hearing distance. Any theory, now, regarding the gunshot?"

"None except that there may be white men on the island as well as savages."

"But why should they be hostile?"

"We'll probably find out. I suggest that you let me have three or four good men and I'll start out in search of water immediately."

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"We'll have breakfast in half an hour. It's only five-thirty."

"All right, except that we may need all the daylight there is."

I set forth accompanied by the two camera men who had retrieved their cameras which apparently had not interested the savages, and had them slung over their shoulders while they tucked their rifles under their arms, and two electricians, also ex-soldiers, named Mahoney and Fiske. We followed the shore westward and we hadn't proceeded half a mile before we came upon a stream which fell from a plateau a quarter of a mile inland, crossed a large grassy clearing and tumbled over rocks to drop twenty feet into a pretty little bay.

It appeared an ideal place for a camp. In fact it had been a camp as we discovered when we found a dump of old tin cans, fish bones and other evidences that people had established themselves here at no remote period. It would be a matter of few hours to shift our tents and impedimenta to this spot as it was easily reached by following the shore. If Ponsomby set up his tractor, he could have all our heavy baggage on the spot by nightfall. We were back in camp in an hour and told the good news to Preudholm.

"O. K.," he said. "We'll start our trek at once."

HE gave orders, the crew rushed at their work and in no time tents were down and being packed and the company was assembled, ready to move at the word. We had to wait, however, while Preudholm went to the beach to give instructions to the detachment who remained with the machinery. And I found myself, with no such intention, standing beside Miss Demerest. I had leaned against a tree and she had been gazing at the beach from the other side of it and all of a sudden we were face to face. She looked at me with hostile eyes and I resented it.

"You don't seem to like me much," I said angrily.

She lifted her chin and showed me her profile.

"You're right," she said curtly.

"In what way have I offended you?"

She didn't answer and I grew more angry.

"You were unnecessarily brutal in discussing me last night," I declared. "One would suppose you had some personal animosity."

"Aren't you entirely responsible for our predicament?" she retorted.

"If I were, it would not be through evil intention."

"No. Just swinish indulgence of your appetite," she asserted.

"Since Mr. Preudholm does not hold me responsible, why should you?" I asked hotly.

She turned upon me a beautiful but unfriendly face.

"I have no desire to be killed by savages, Mr. Desmond."

"There is no danger of that. We are perfectly able to take care of ourselves."

"I am not at all sure that you and this ship captain did not bring us here intentionally," she said. "I have a notion that Mr. Homer hit the nail on the head."

"You believe I am a crook as well as a drunkard."

"Mr. Desmond," she retorted. "I believe you capable of anything."

She made to walk away and I grasped her arm. She wrenched it loose and faced me.

"You have no justification for that

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remark," I exclaimed. "You and I exchanged our first words on this island. You know nothing about me. You have taken a violent dislike to me for no reason at all."

"I do not care to continue this conversation, Mr. Desmond," she said sharply.

"I shall never speak to you again," I exclaimed. "Don't worry."

She had turned away, but now she stopped and faced me again.

"In that case," she said, "perhaps I should tell you that I know quite a little about you. I know something of your career since you left the Army. I know that you are a despicable scoundrel, *Captain* Desmond. Good-by."

She left me shocked and astounded. I had never seen the girl in my life until I encountered her in Tahiti. I had never heard of her. And I wasn't a scoundrel. A fool, maybe, and a drunkard until recently, but I had never committed a crime or knowingly wronged anybody.

NOT even Mildred truthfully could have accused me of being a scoundrel, though, to oblige her, I had committed the only illegal act of my life. Mildred—Mrs. Wright Sampson, now, who wintered at Palm Beach and Santa Barbara, who yachted in the Mediterranean and was pictured in a Sunday illustrated section of a New York newspaper which I had picked up a few years back in San Francisco as being the leading exponent of the semi-nude bathing cult at Juan Les Pins.

I had no hard feelings against my ex-wife, Mildred. I had too much sense to blame her because I had made a dirty mess of my life. I hoped she was happy with that stuffed shirt, Wright Sampson. She had what she had always wanted—money and social position. I went to pieces because I didn't have an object in life and that's about all.

This is a story about what happened to a motion picture company which was marooned upon an uncharted South Seas island and incidentally my own adventures as a member of the troupe, but I guess the readers need to know something about me, and this is as good a place as any to tell it.

I was a gilded youth, you might say. I was brought up by an aunt who had millions. She gave me all the money I needed and I had a gay time in school and college and was just starting to raise hob on Broadway when the war broke out and I went into a training camp. It was at the training camp that I met Mildred Holworth, who was nineteen and ravishing and boiling with patriotism and admiration for uniforms. I fell for her, hook, line and sinker and became engaged the night before I sailed for France.

When I came back Mildred was waiting and we were married and, for a few months, I thought I was the happiest man in the world. Well, my aunt died. She had been rabidly pro-Ally and after the war was violently for the League of Nations and the milk supply for the undernourished children of Germany and Belgium. She made a big fuss over me when I came back from France and she gave me a wedding present in the form of a ten thousand dollar check.

When she died it was revealed that she had willed all her money to the European Relief societies. She said in the will that she knew that her beloved nephew would gladly sacrifice his own prospects for such a good cause.

It was a blow, of course, but I made the best of it and went out and got

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myself a job selling bonds. It wasn't for quite a while that I discovered that Mildred was unhappy because I supposed she was as much in love with me as I was with her.

Mildred liked me and my uniform, but she had married me for my prospects, as I learned in time. There was no money in her family, and she was mad about clothes and the right kind of people. We began to bicker and then to quarrel, usually about expenses. The depression of 1921 began and I couldn't sell many bonds. Troubles increased. At a time when I was desperate she informed me that her marriage had been a mistake and that she wanted a divorce. She said she knew I couldn't pay her expenses to Reno, but she knew where she could get them.

I wouldn't stand for that, so I went out and made arrangements to supply her with evidence of unfaithfulness which would enable her to obtain her divorce in New York. It's done all the time because of the rigid and antiquated divorce laws of New York. They call it collusion and it's a penal offense, but few are ever prosecuted for it. A week after the divorce became final, Mildred married Wright Sampson, who had been waiting in the offing.

BY that time I was drinking heavily, out of work, and on my way down. You see, I actually had been in love with Mildred. I didn't jump to the conclusion that all women were rotten, but, since the only one who mattered to me was like that, I didn't give a damn about anything.

It was tough enough for ex-soldiers to catch on after the war when they were full of ambition and had objects for which to work. I had none and I drifted. That's all there was to my story. I went west, and the farther west I traveled the more worthless I became, and I ended up, like so many drifters, in the South Seas.

I never killed anybody and I never wronged a woman and I never robbed a till, but that's the best that can be said of me. Oh, yes, I sent back letters from Mildred, which, occasionally, caught up with me, unopened. The woman persisted in the fiction that we should be friends even if divorced and tried to correspond, and every time that I received one of the big envelopes in her characteristic script, I went on a spree, after first writing "address unknown" on the envelope.

For several years her letters had ceased to pursue me, and I hadn't thought about her for a long time and when the break came in Papeete I had been able to pull myself together and grasp at it.

Result: I was on a beautiful and possibly devilish island with a motion picture troupe, to all the members of whom except the director and my two camera men I was a pariah. I had been unjustly accused and contemptuously treated by the only woman to whom I had been drawn for years. I would have been far happier if Jake and Nick had left me half-intoxicated in filthy Papeete.

Preudholm was shouting for me, and I shrugged my shoulders and joined him.

Two hours later we were settled in our permanent camp; our tents in soldierly rows, a very ingenious kitchen on two wheels in operation, and load after load of machinery arriving.

I suppose our camp must have been a charming picture, with our ladies in pretty white costumes moving about and our men in drill and helmets and our fine tents—a picnic upon a de luxe

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scale perhaps—with a background of waving palms and thickly wooded hills, and a lovely little river singing its way to the sea at our left.

The sound of axes and the occasional crash of a tree were heard. On my suggestion, Preudholm had decided to build a stockade around our camp. Of an enemy there was no indication, but we had two men with rifles posted at the edge of the bush. We were no longer on the beach, which was a good thing, as some of us might have been tempted because of the heat to go bathing. Bathing upon an unexplored Pacific island is more dangerous than bullets.

CHAPTER VII.

VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY.

THE night passed with no alarms. We had dined upon our supplies and I marveled at the delicacies which are now perfectly preserved in cans. We had doubled our sentries at dark, put out our fires but erected a search light whose broad white beam could be turned in any direction to illuminate any point where trouble seemed to be brewing. The actors clustered in a little group outside the tent of Miss Demerest and chattered in low tones. I sat beside Preudholm on the ground outside his tent and discussed our prospects.

"I've got a picture to make," he said, "and I am going to assume that we shall be taken off this island at the end of a month, so I want to get work started. Until I know exactly what we are up against here, I won't know what changes to make in my script. I came to shoot the primitive—and it seems to be that all right.

"It may be that conditions on this island will give us a better story than what I have, which I'm not crazy about. All successful South Seas films have been done in Polynesian islands; it may be a break to have stumbled upon black savages, but we have been here two days and have learned almost nothing. I've got to keep my people busy. Homer hates me anyway and that scoundrel Kernan is a born trouble maker. Have you any suggestions?"

"Give me your power boat and a couple of men and I'll circumnavigate the island. When I come back, I'll know how many miles it is in circumference and that's all we need to estimate its area. After that we'll drive an expedition directly across it."

He nodded. "I ought to go with you, but I can't leave this outfit without a boss. I'll send Nick or Jake with you to make pictures. You may stumble upon some marvelous locations."

"Very good. It's a pity we have no machine guns."

The director laughed. "Our story is supposed to take place a hundred years ago before rapid fire weapons were invented. You see, we take only what equipment our script requires."

"In that case it's a wonder they didn't send you out with muzzle loading muskets."

He thumped me on the back and bellowed. "We've got 'em. I had modern rifles added to our equipment because I had a hunch I might have to take the troupe to some wild place if I didn't like Tahiti, and, just as well as not I could have had machine guns but I didn't think of it. What time do you want to start?"

"At dawn."

"Better turn in. I'll give instructions to have the launch ready. To-morrow I'll have our radio reception set in operation. Pick up some dance music

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from the Ambassador in Los Angeles to remind our people of what they are missing. Good night, Desmond."

I slept on the ground in front of my tent to be sure that the first rays of the sun would awaken me. I was overjoyed that the director had fallen in with my proposal to circumnavigate the island because I wanted to get away from these people.

I wanted to get away from Dora Demerest so that her angry suspicious eyes could not be on me. I had assured her that I would never speak to her again and she had had the bitter last word. What could she know or have heard about me which would make her so savagely inimical? The girl, naturally, must have a sweet and generous character or her outward appearance was a lie.

Well, let her think what she liked. She was nothing to me. Ordinary courtesy had been my only reason for addressing her in the first place. No, I knew that wasn't true. She had pleased me, attracted me by that subtle fluid known as magnetism which draws certain men to certain women for no reason they can explain.

While I slept, I dreamed that she came to me and pleaded to be forgiven. She said she had mistaken me for some other Desmond. The sun came over the horizon and shot a level ray against my eyelids which woke me.

I YAWNED and scrambled to my feet. Dawn had come with tropic unexpectedness and, in a few moments, land and sea were flooded with blinding radiance. The eastern sky was a riot of crimson and purple, now being rapidly obliterated by the golden orb which had come out of the ocean. Its rays danced dazzlingly upon the sea which was of burnished copper while the spray dashing high above the multitudinous reefs was tinged with all the hues of the rainbow.

I looked inland, where shadows still lingered. As I have said, I believe, our camp ground extended nearly a quarter of a mile and ended at a verdure clad cliff over which our river tumbled. This cliff was perhaps fifty feet high, the wall of a table land beyond which were visible the tops of hills. As I looked, I saw a figure standing upon a rock beside the waterfall, a figure which seemed gigantic and black as coal. It was a man, naked, whose grease coated skin glistened in the morning sunlight. He held both hands high above his head and in one was a knotty club; in the other a throwing spear.

He seemed to be cluttered with ornaments from neck to midriff. It was too far to discern his countenance, but I could imagine it. As I gazed he hurled the spear in the direction of our camp, a gesture merely, since we were a dozen times the distance of effect for a javelin and it fell to the ground a couple of hundred yards from our tents. After that he dropped his club, lifted both hands to heaven like one in prayer, picked up his club and vanished.

I looked around. Our landward sentinel was lying on his back, sound asleep. The other guardsman was leaning on his rifle on the opposite side of camp and blinking stupidly at the rising sun. We would have been certain victims of a savage rush. I muttered an oath, went into Preudholm's tent and awakened him.

Like a good soldier he came out of slumber with all his senses alert. Preudholm, incidentally, never drank a drop while actually on a job. I told him what I had seen and how lax our watch had been.

"Trouble is," he said, "that we can't

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actually make these fools believe that there is any danger until they land in some cannibal's stew. I'll raise hell about this and I'll appoint an officer of the guard to keep tab on the sentries. Jake's going with you and an electrician named Murphy who knows how to run a motor boat. Remember you're absolutely vital to this outfit so don't do anything rash."

"I realize that, sir."

"Wake those fellows up and get started. You don't want to wait for breakfast, I suppose."

"No."

"How long will it take you to go round the island, do you think?"

"If it's a small island we should be back by dark. We may be away three days. I told them to put three days' grub on board and a can of fresh water. Best of luck."

I shook hands with this fine fellow and went out and dragged my companions from their cots. In fifteen minutes we had the launch afloat and were moving slowly through the transparent waters of the cove at the head of which Captain Delire had landed our outfit.

With each turn of the propeller my spirits rose. The islands get into a fellow's blood and there is nothing more inspiring than sailing island waters with a good bottom under one and plenty to eat. I had taken fishing tackle; we carried three rifles and plenty of ammunition. Jake was my friend, Murphy had no animosity toward me and those who disliked me were being left behind.

WE headed for the opening in the reef and turned south. Jake pleaded to run as close to the shore as possible so that he could shoot scenery and after proceeding a few miles the inner reef petered out and we were able to skim along within a hundred yards of shore. Thanks to the outer reefs we moved through smooth and translucent water and Jake was busier looking at the curious fish that flashed back and forth beneath us than operating his reflex or motion picture camera.

I sat in the stern and steered, Murphy loafed forward as his engine was functioning smoothly. Jake leaned over the side of the boat and gibbered at each marvel he discerned.

Years ago I had been told by a veteran newspaper man that he had never encountered a news photographer who was right in the head.

"For some reason a man needs to be a little unbalanced to know a news picture when he sees it," he said. And, as the best pictures can only be secured at a greater risk of life and limb than any photograph in the world deserves, the best photographers are nuts of the first water.

Back there in France Nick had informed me that Jake was goofy while Jake had confided in me that Nick was nuts.

Apparently the qualities essential in news photographers are demanded in higher degree in motion picture camera men since the pair of them had become eminent in that profession.

I don't think the journalist was right in asserting that photographers were insane, however. My experience with Nick and Jake had taught me that they were warm-hearted simple fellows who were so steeped in the business of peering through cameras that they seemed stupid when they did not see the world through lenses. In that they resembled great musicians, celebrated actors and even captains of industry who had devoted their lives to their

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specialties and were like children in their judgment and attitude toward other matters.

Jake was like a child at the aquarium as he gazed down through the clear waters at fish that were colored like the rainbow and were of every conceivable shape. His round eyes were popping with wonder, his fat cheeks were puffed and he was actually talking to the sea creatures.

We were headed for the high rocky point I had seen the first day, which I sincerely hoped might be the end of the island, for the smaller it was the fewer the savages it could support.

Presently we ran out of the protection of the reefs and began to rise and fall upon an ocean swell, whereupon Jake proceeded to lose interest in the fish, not because the water was less clear, but because it was less smooth.

Seasickness made rapid progress with him and he implored us to let him land and walk back to the camp. That, however, I thought more dangerous than *mal de mer*.

Presently we came abreast of the headland and I saw that it was only a promontory and that the island was much larger than I had believed. We had to keep out to sea for a while as heavy rollers were smashing upon the headland but within a couple of miles we were again sheltered by reefs and Jake felt better.

I COULD see now that the island extended ten miles further to the west. We passed numerous coves, saw long beaches of golden sand, another beach of black sand and ran along a stretch of shore which, by the character of the vegetation, I judged to be swampy. This was proved when we passed the mouth of a broad stream.

Our launch, running at half speed, made about five miles an hour and I turned the tiller over to Murphy and made a rough sketch of the contour of the island. At the end of three hours we were running along a low coast line which ended in a long sandy spit. This we rounded in time and had a view of the west side of the island. My hope that it was fairly narrow was shattered immediately by a view of an irregular shore extending far into the west, most of which was bold and rocky.

I estimated that it must be twenty miles across the island from our camp to the opposite side and that the island was from thirty to forty miles long. This would give it an area of from six hundred to a thousand square miles and caused me to revise my first opinion that it was unknown and uncharted. I didn't believe that so much land within a couple of weeks' sailing radius of Tahiti could possibly be unknown and uncharted. Furthermore, there were no reefs of any consequence upon the west side and our frail craft began at once to be tossed upon open ocean.

I had to head west-north-west for the next headland which took us five or six miles out to sea and renewed the unhappiness of Jake Gorham. As we approached it, it proved to be a bluff of volcanic rock and I had to give it a wide berth to keep out of the breakers.

We then coasted a rocky and uninviting shore for several miles and came unexpectedly upon what seemed to be a harbor entrance. What was inside we could not make out, because of the character of the shore, until we were directly opposite and discovered that a harbor actually was concealed behind the forbidding rocks which formed a natural breakwater.

"We'll put in here until you get

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well," I told Jake. "And you may get a chance to use your camera." He perked up immediately.

I turned our nose into the harbor entrance and discovered, at the head of a long, narrow and perfectly protected haven a stretch of yellow beach and beyond, shaded by a grove of coconut trees, a house.

"Full speed ahead," I said excitedly to the electrician. "This must be a plantation."

If there was a plantation on this island there would be communication with the outside world. It meant that we wouldn't be long marooned; that I could take good news back to the company.

It made more of a mystery than ever of being landed upon the wrong island by Captain Delire, but there would be plenty of time to solve that.

As our launch ran up the narrow bay, the rocks fell away and were replaced by thickly vegetated, low lying shores. The scene was so heavenly that the instinct which made Jake a fine photographer conquered the qualms of his stomach and he picked up his motion picture machine and set its machinery in motion.

The water was now very light green and sparkling like a sea of emeralds. I saw a pier jutting out into the water at the head of the harbor. I picked up the binoculars which had been supplied by Preudholm and looked for the inhabitants, who naturally would be drawn to the shore by the entrance of an unknown power boat. Nobody appeared.

NOW we were drawing near to the wharf and I saw evidences of decay. The piling was a mass of sea-moss, and green stuff was growing on its planks. Nor did the house look as attractive as it had from a distance. My heart began to sink.

"Never mind the pier," I said to Murphy. "Run her up on the beach. That wharf is rotten."

In a couple of minutes we slid gently upon the sands, jumped out and pulled the boat up the beach a bit.

"Take your guns," I said sharply. "Drop that camera, Jake. You can make pictures later.

The sand was soft and our feet sank into it but we were soon treading on grass and nearing the dwelling. It was abandoned. It had been a large bungalow with a wide screened-in porch. The screens were torn and tattered and the windows on the front of the house were broken. There had been a lawn but now the grass was thick and long and might be a hiding place for venomous reptiles. While there are few such in the South Seas, certain islands have various species. We stepped warily.

Behind the cottage I saw the roofs of a number of small structures; outhouses and servants' and laborers' quarters. I had already discerned plantain trees, in profusion, and a vast array of coconut palms. It had been a plantation, all right. There was no evidence of living beings in the vicinity.

"They moved away," observed Jake. "Probably didn't like the neighbors," he added with a laugh.

"Maybe you're speaking more truthfully than you suppose," I said. "I'm going to look through the house but I don't want to be trapped in it. You fellows keep watch and fire a shot if anybody appears."

I stepped on the porch and the boards creaked beneath my feet and one of them broke. Rotten. Wood rots rapidly in these latitudes because of excessive moisture.

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The front door was ajar. I pushed it gingerly and it fell from its hinges with a crash. I stepped over it and stood in a room which extended the full width of the house. The room was a story in itself. Every article of furniture had been smashed into splinters. The place was completely wrecked.

There had been bookshelves on the opposite side of the room and there seemed to be a few books on them. I climbed over the kindling wood and picked up one of the volumes. It was one of a de luxe set of Victor Hugo in French. There was no bookplate in it and no inscription to reveal to whom it had originally belonged.

I examined the other books and found nothing to identify the owner. It was useless to bother further but curiosity carried me into two bedrooms which had been wrecked as wantonly as the living room. There was an addition at the rear which contained the kitchen and I pushed open the door which was firm on its hinges.

I stepped into a big room with a huge iron stove at the left—but that was not what affrighted me. There was a man in the center of the room. A huge man, at least six feet three. He was naked save for a loin cloth and he was white, though his skin was tanned to a golden brown.

His black hair was long, he had a curling black beard and his eyes were black and wild.

"*Bien venue,*" he snarled in French and he came at me.

I swung my rifle, but his spring was as swift as a tiger's. He was on me like a flash and I collapsed under him like a deer in a tiger's claws. He had hands which were of iron and fingers that were of steel and he was choking me into insensibility. I struggled desperately, but I was up against four times my strength. Things went black and I knew no more.

CHAPTER VIII.

NAPOLEON THE FOURTH.

WHEN I came back to consciousness I was lying upon the dirt floor of a South Seas island hut, which might be likened to a great woven basket turned upside down upon the ground. My arms and legs were tightly bound with fiber rope. My neck hurt, my ankles and wrists stung from their thongs and I was conscious of being hungry and thirsty. Then I realized that I was probably in the hands of a madman.

He had throttled me. Why hadn't he strangled me? What had happened to Jake and Murphy and the launch? Where was I and what was in the cards?

I wrestled vainly with my bonds for several minutes and gave it up. I waited what seemed an interminable time and then I began to shout. Might as well have whatever was to come made known to me. If I were to die, better to die at once.

I stopped yelling when I heard harsh voices in altercation outside the hut and a moment later some one entered through an opening in the basketwork behind me.

"Silence," rasped a bass voice in the French language. The white brute who had throttled me appeared beside me, squatted on his haunches and gazed down upon me ferociously. He had my rifle in his hand and my bandolier slung over his naked shoulder.

"Who are you and where am I?" I demanded. "You are a white man. Why attack one of your own people?"

He grinned at me. "I am a king," he

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said importantly. "Napoleon the Fourth, King and Emperor of New Europe."

"You're loony," I replied in English and added swiftly in French: "Is that the name of this island, New Europe?" I had never heard of such an island in the South Seas.

"I have given it that name," he replied, "but who are you to ask questions of a king? I shall question you."

"Untie me or I'll answer none of them," I replied angrily. "These bonds are killing me."

HE threw back his head and laughed. "Fortunate for you if they killed you," he replied, "if you propose to defy my majesty. Who are these people who are camped on the other side of the island?"

"What became of my friends and my boat?" I countered.

He laughed again. "I did not need them and they had rifles. For an hour they searched for you and then they departed in their boat which moves without sails. Presently I shall kill them and the others. Now answer my question. Have they come here for my pearls?"

"They are friends," I said eagerly. "They do not know of your existence and they know nothing of pearls."

"You lie!" he snarled. "They are my enemies. They are English and I have a blood feud with them. It was the English who destroyed my ancestor the great Napoleon."

"Do you mean to tell me you are a descendant of Napoleon?" I asked incredulously.

"Great-grandson of the Duke of Reichstadt, Napoleon's son."

I knew now that he was mad because L'Aiglon had no offspring, but I was too astute to contradict him.

"In that case [illegible] said tactfully. "My [illegible] other side of the island are [illegible] but Americans. As allies of Napole[illegible] they waged war on England in 1812. They are eager to be friends with you."

"I do not want them," he replied. "No matter who they are they shall die; all except the woman with the hair of gold who shall share my throne."

Dora Demerest! I had every reason to hate Miss Demerest except that I never was any good at hating people. I didn't even hate Mildred, though I despised her. I shuddered at the thought of the beautiful, delicate young actress in the hands of this mad white savage.

"Was it you who fired a shot into our camp?" I demanded.

He nodded proudly. "It was my defiance," he declared. "And my last cartridge. Soon I shall have all the rifles you have brought with you and, after I have drilled my soldiers in their use, I shall conquer the world."

"Has your majesty ever been to Europe?" I asked politely.

"No. I was born on this island, but nevertheless I shall conquer Europe."

I estimated his age at thirty-five.

"In that case you will need a general," I said craftily. "I was a soldier in the World War. Let me train your troops."

"World War?" he repeated. "I do not know about that. When was it?"

"It lasted from 1914 to 1918 and was won by France and her allies, including America."

I was watching him closely and I saw that my proposition interested him.

"You will join me and help me kill your friends?" he asked slowly. "That will make you a traitor, will it not?"

"If you kill me, I cannot help them," I replied. "I do not want to die. And those people are not my

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..e me out. That's ..o this side of the island." ..aped to his feet and returned ..n a second with a long knife with which he cut my bonds.

"I think you lie," he declared, "but you cannot escape and I shall kill you if you try. Come with me."

I tried to rise and my limbs failed me. He caught me by the shoulders and helped me to my feet. "I tied you myself," he boasted. "I am expert in all I do."

He led me to the exit from the hut and pushed me outside in front of him.

I was standing in a valley of unearthly beauty and in the center of a large native village. Through the middle of the valley flowed a beautiful little river; gently sloping hills rose on either side to a height of five or six hundred feet and upon them every variety of tropic tree and plant grew in luxuriance.

THE village consisted of two long rows of wicker huts similar to that in which I had been imprisoned and between the rows there was a street about a hundred feet wide in which gamboled naked black native children, mothers wearing only a loin cloth, and strolling black men who wore nothing whatever save neck, arm and leg ornaments of bone.

At the lower end of the street was a great structure which was only a huge thatched roof supported by poles, evidently an assembly place for the tribe. At the upper end was a large hut before the entrance of which were planted two tall poles from which flew long streamers of feathers. He led me to it.

"My palace," he said with pride.

I made a rapid estimate. It looked like a village of four or five hundred people which meant from eighty to a hundred warriors.

"Your majesty has a mighty capital," I declared. "This, I suppose, is only one of your many cities."

"I have four other towns," he informed me. "Come."

He strode ahead of me up the avenue, carrying my rifle by the barrel and holding his head very high. Our progress created intense excitement. From every hut poured women, fat and lean, but always jet black, some with babies at their naked breasts.

Black men appeared, huge brawny warriors, weaponless because they were at home. They all had artificially enlarged ear lobes from which depended huge bone ornaments and some of them had holes in their noses through which bones were thrust giving the effect of cats' whiskers.

As the "king" passed, these fellows dropped on hands and knees and rubbed their noses in the dirt. The women merely stood and stared at me, making low voiced comments upon my personal appearance in a tongue unfamiliar to me.

Outside the king's house were four armed warriors. These had wicker shields and each carried a long spear. One of the spears had a steel point but the others were only sharpened stakes blackened by fire to a needle-like point. They lifted the spears and saluted the monarch gutturally. He ignored them and stooped to enter his house. I followed, of course.

It was a square building, semi-dark as there were no windows. In each corner squatted a woman, two of whom were n u r s i n g babies. His majesty growled something, whereupon the ladies scuttled for a rear exit and disappeared, babes and all.

"My queens," said his majesty. "When I get the woman with gold hair, I shall make these her servants."

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Much as I disliked Dora Demerest, I would lay down my life to save her from such a fate. I would even die to protect the character woman from the clutches of the brute.

I gazed round the unfurnished interior. The earth floor was clean, but there were no sleeping arrangements, no chairs, no table, no evidence of any conveniences. But, as I was able to see better, I discerned, of all things, a pile of books in a corner, and I pointed to them.

"My library," he informed me. "I read. That is why I know about the world and its peoples. I study so that I may conquer them."

He dropped on his haunches like the black savages and I sat on the floor. Evidently he was not aware of the etiquette which forbids sitting in the presence of a king or ignored it.

"Are you the only white person in your kingdom?" I asked.

"I hate white people," he said angrily. "I would kill you as I would a scorpion."

I HASTENED to change the subject. "Since you can read, you must know about the comforts and conveniences of civilization. Why do you not introduce them?"

He shrugged his big shoulders. "I have all a man can desire. Food, drink, sleep, and subjects to do my will. In cold countries, clothes and heat are necessary. We need none of those here. Tell me, is that golden haired woman beautiful when she is naked?"

I choked down my anger. "I don't know," I replied. "Civilized people do not see women without clothing."

"Then how do you know if they are beautiful?" he asked shrewdly. "Before I make her my queen I shall strip her to see if she is worthy."

"You speak French perfectly, sire," I said hastily. "Yet you have no opportunity to practice it."

"I was ten years old when my parents were killed," he said. "Twice, since, have I spoken to white men—to tell them that they would die by fire."

His eyes glittered so wickedly that I shivered.

"White men are bad," he declared. "Death is too good for them. You I may spare if you assist me in slaying those at your camp; the others will die terribly."

"Why do you hate the whites?"

"Because they killed my people. English, they were, who had heard that the grandson of Napoleon lived peacefully upon this island. They are murderers and robbers, the English."

"But these are Americans; they are peaceful."

"Then why have they come?"

"To make a motion picture."

"What is that?"

I realized the impossibility of explaining the miracle of the film. "It is a new form of entertainment," I said lamely. "Men go all over the world to make photographs of interesting events and people. By a machine which moves the photographs rapidly, the pictures seem to be alive."

"Sorcery. Sorcerers must die," he said grimly.

"They are not sorcerers. It is a modern invention. You could learn to make motion pictures. They will teach you, if you like."

"Nevertheless I shall kill them," he said. "Listen. This island belonged to my father. He had wide plantations. Occasionally a ship came to buy his products and to sell him slaves. All these blacks were formerly my father's slaves.

"One night a ship came. My par-

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ents were sleeping. The white men broke into the house to kill. My mother and father died in their sleep. My nurse carried me into the hills with the bag of pearls which these murderers coveted. Since then no whites have come to the island save twice and each time I have led my subjects and driven them off with terrible slaughter, just as I shall eventually slaughter these friends of yours."

He was silent and brooding. I didn't dare speak lest in his anger he end my life on the spot. I understood the situation now and the mystery of the Melanesians upon an island in the Polynesian zone was explained.

Napoleon's parents were French planters who had purchased slaves from traders — who had kidnaped blacks from islands far to the east and unloaded them here. As blacks were congenitally savage and ferocious, the father of this young man could buy them for very much less than Polynesian laborers would cost and avoid trouble with the French rulers of this part of the Pacific. He must have been a strong, fearless man to be able to tame the black islanders. Apparently he ruled them effectively, and he had lost his life, not through a native uprising, but at the hands of white pirates.

The blacks had fled into the interior with the young son of their master and, as it was unlikely that the planter had made any effort to civilize them, they had slid back into a savage state almost immediately. However, they had cared for the child, and when he grew older he had become their king as a matter of course.

Napoleon, as he called himself, might have been a well educated child of eight or ten, but he had been a savage for a quarter of a century. He had gone black and considered all whites his enemies.

THERE was no way of arguing with him. If his intelligence was superior to that of the inky Melanesians, his passions were as unruly and he was a far greater menace to the Mammoth Film troupe than a black king would have been.

A really savage monarch is childlike and easily cajoled. Napoleon was not to be tricked into friendship by beads and gin. He had a blood feud with all of white blood. He proposed to kill me as he would an insect when he found that I would no longer be useful to him.

Thirty years back the presence here of a prosperous plantation made it an occasional port of call for island schooners. Attacks by savages had driven off vessels which touched here after the tragedy and in the end the place became forgotten and its traditions lost.

Captain Delire must have put in here under stress at one time, have seen no evidence of inhabitants, and assumed because of the reefs upon the east side of the island that it was too difficult of access to be visited, and thought of it when he needed a place to maroon Preudholm and his company. As he and his fellow conspirators needed us in their business, he certainly would not have chosen an island teeming with black savages led by a resourceful and vindictive white king.

"We have but one rifle," the man said at length. "You may be a soldier, but you can be of no use to men armed with spears and javelins."

"In your reading," I asked eagerly, "did you ever read about King Chaka of the Zulus and his impis?"

"No. I do not read as much as I

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used to. I had not read for a long time, but yesterday I remembered that there were still books at my father's house, and I went to get them. That is how I found you prowling in my house."

"Chaka's men were African savages," I said rapidly. "They had only bow and spear. He learned discipline from the English and he trained his warriors to march as one man, to attack like a machine, to die rather than disobey a word of command. With his soldiers, he conquered all the other tribes who were not trained like his men and then, when he died, his son defeated English armies armed with guns and cannons."

"Can you train my men like that?" he asked eagerly.

"Certainly," I said confidently, "but it will take time."

"How long?"

"Six months."

"Too long. I shall give you one month."

I sighed with relief. Of course I was only sparring for time. My prospects of being impaled in five minutes, if he decided that I was useless to him, were excellent. I would have some measure of freedom if I were appointed drill master of these savages and an opportunity of escape might present itself.

And every day that I could delay an attack upon the camp would aid Preudholm in preparing to repulse it. My disappearance would alarm him and make the skeptical among the troupe realize that grave danger lurked on the island. I did not think the director would make an attempt to find me because he had women to protect and a division of his forces, when he did not know the strength of his enemy, would be perilous.

A leader who was not a trained soldier might send out a rescue expedition from the goodness of his heart but, if I had been in J. Ponsomby's place, I would not have risked a man upon such an expedition and our director was a former British army officer who would reason as I did. I thought, bitterly, that there would be no spontaneous demand from the company that an attempt to rescue me be made. As far as the actors were concerned, they held me responsible for their predicament and they would not mourn my loss.

Capturing the motion picture company was going to be quite a job even for Melanesians under Zulu discipline, assuming I was able to establish it—which I had no real intention of doing.

CHAPTER IX.

KING OF CANNIBALS.

FOR several hours I sat in the wicker palace of King Napoleon while the white savage talked to me. His French grew more fluent as he exercised it and he evidently enjoyed making use of the language of his boyhood. It was cultured French. If I closed my eyes I might have supposed that I was conversing with a civilized though insane person.

My life depended upon getting rapidly into his good graces. What had seemed important problems—the purpose of marooning the Preudholm company on this island; the method of defense of our camp against attack—these were insignificant now because the chances were that I might not live out the day.

Your true savage is credulous, good natured, and easily bamboozled. I had been in tight places before and bluffed my way out of them but I had been dealing with full blooded natives,

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Polynesians, to be sure, but savages. If the savage doesn't murder you out of hand, you have a chance.

Napoleon was a horse of a different color. He was naked, married to four black women, content with savage food and customs, yet he had the white man's lust of conquest. Ruling this island he yearned to go forth and place the necks of other nations under his heel.

Having read a great many French books, he had no illusions that the white race was a race of magicians. None of the tricks of South Seas traders would fool him. Apparently his development had ceased at the age of ten, but an educated white boy of ten years is mentally far ahead of adult savages.

And, while he professed to hate white men, he had the Caucasian's predilection for a white wife. From the bush he had gazed upon Dora Demerest and desired her.

I was so immersed in my thoughts that I failed to answer a question and I was suddenly knocked over by a vicious blow in the face. He was standing over me with blazing eyes, his upper lip drawn back in a wolf's snarl.

"*Répondez!*" he shouted to the top of his lungs.

"*Oui, oui, oui,*" I exclaimed hastily. With a howl he drew back and kicked me in the side. Had his feet not been bare he would have stove in my ribs.

"You have not listened to me," he charged.

"I do not speak French as well as you, majesty," I said tactfully. The sun came out upon his wrath and he smiled complacently.

"Though I have not talked it for years, my French is perfect," he boasted. "I asked you how I could get the girl with gold hair."

"You will have to kill everybody in the camp," I replied.

He hesitated. "They have many guns," he said. "Many of my warriors will fall. It is better to buy her. I will give your chief many pearls for her and spare the lives of his men if they will leave my island immediately."

I shook my head. "You cannot buy white women," I told him.

"I will give them fifty of my women in exchange."

"Your majesty," I said boldly, "white men fight for their women. And my friends have weapons more powerful than you have ever seen. The only way you can conquer them is by careful preparation and special training of your warriors. Give me a month and I promise you that, when you attack the camp, it will fall."

"I want her now," he said like a big child. "I will not wait."

"Very well. Send me into camp and I will make your offer," I said hopefully.

HE scowled. "I do not trust you. You stay here. Tell me what I must do to train my warriors like this Zulu king of whom you spoke."

"How many soldiers have you?"

He began to count, using his fingers.

"Not counting the old ones, I can muster five hundred men."

This was bad news if he was telling the truth. I had hoped that he had no more than two or three hundred savages at the most.

"Assemble them here in a few days and I will train them," I said boldly. The king held his sides as he roared with mirth.

"You!" he exclaimed. "You would be clubbed to death by the first warrior to whom you gave an order. You will

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tell me what to do and I shall drill my troops."

"Very well, your majesty."

"Begin now."

"You must make them understand that when you order them into battle the man who retreats before you give the word will die more unpleasantly than he would by an enemy's knife or bullet."

"My men never retreat," he said contemptuously.

"That is because you have never led them against a powerful enemy."

"Very well. I'll have any coward killed and eaten—"

I stared at him, horror stricken. "Are these men cannibals?" I gasped.

He grinned. "Why not? Meat is hard to get. Myself, I do not like human flesh, but my people have eaten their enemies since time began. Go on."

"Train them to charge in a solid body. Men advancing individually are easily put to flight."

I was getting hard put to it because, to tell the truth, I didn't know anything about Chaka the Zulu's military tactics.

"That is true," he said. "My ancestor, the great Napoleon, won his battles by charging the enemy with solid masses at their weakest spot. 'Defeat your enemy in detail,' was his word."

I gaped at him. The black-bearded naked white savage was a student of Napoleon, knew nearly as much of military tactics as I.

"You forget, king," I said hastily, "that Napoleon first disorganized his enemy by artillery fire, and then sent his marvelous cavalry at them. You have neither cannon, horses or firearms. You plan to attack white men, well armed, with warriors carrying spears and clubs. You can't follow Napoleon's tactics."

"I have ten men to their one," he said coolly. "But you speak well. I must make my warriors understand—" He rushed out of the "palace" and shouted an order.

A drum began to rumble. Instantly the village was in turmoil. Several minutes passed and then Blackbeard thrust his face into the house.

"Come," he commanded.

IN the open space before the king's house, the entire military strength of the village was assembled in two long ranks. It was my first view of Melanesian warriors drawn up for battle and it was a terrifying sight.

There were about a hundred and fifty men in line—brawny blacks who had no time to paint their faces, but who were hideous enough without artificial aid. Each man had slung over his shoulder a long shield of wood, decorated crudely and pointed at each end. Each carried a six foot spear in his left hand and a knotted club of hardwood in the other.

The king had armed himself with a club and now stepped out in front of his army and made a speech in a tongue unknown to me. He talked for five minutes and when he stopped a terrific howl went up. Behind the soldiers the women and children of the village had assembled and their yipping rose shrill above the roar of the warriors.

"I have told them they must fear me more than the enemy," he said to me in French. "Now I will prove it to them."

He snapped a command and two particularly stout fellows came forward. His majesty harangued them for a moment and then turned to the main body. It was not necessary for him to translate his orders for the two picked men lifted their spears, hurled them and impaled two warriors.

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They threw their spears from a distance of about thirty feet. Instantly they swung their shields into position on their left arms, lifted their clubs and rushed forward, while the entire army, with horrid cries, bore down on them. One of them rushed boldly against the multitude and was immediately mowed down. The other hesitated, turned, dropped his club and made to fly.

Crash!

Napoleon the Fourth's royal mace descended upon the wretch's woolly head and crushed it like an eggshell, and Napoleon's bull voice pealed a command.

With some confusion, the savages drew off and again formed in line.

The king gave them some instructions, turned his back and reëntered his house, motioning to me to follow him. I obeyed, sick and white and trembling.

Napoleon grinned widely. "You have seen," he said. "Already they understand that death behind is worse than death in front. I have given them the coward's body to be eaten. They can eat only men killed in battle and it is long since there has been a battle. To-night there will be great rejoicing."

I was so disgusted that I couldn't speak for a second and then, seeing him begin to frown, I hastened to tell him that he was a great king and could not be beaten by any foe, white or black.

Any pity which I might have felt for the white child carried off by savages and forced to be their king ended then and there. Napoleon was as brutal as the worst of the natives, and ten times as dangerous. So long as he lived, our camp was terribly menaced. With him out of the way, we would have no trouble with the leaderless black fellows.

He had slaughtered two of his best warriors as an object lesson. He had ordered the unfortunates to charge many times their numbers. The one who obeyed was cut to pieces. The more intelligent man was slain by his ferocious ruler.

I was to find out that the thought of being eaten was fifty times as terrible as death to these Melanesians. The soul of the eaten one merges with that of his devourer and increases his strength and thus misses the eternity in the savage paradise which causes a warrior to lay down his life fearlessly in battle.

My suggestion, made in hope of prolonging my own life, had resulted in inspiring the black men with more than normal courage and made them a more formidable enemy to my friends than otherwise they might have been.

HOWEVER, Napoleon was pleased as Punch with the show he had put on and, for the time being, well disposed toward me. During my acquaintance with him I found no vestige of conscience in him. What he had learned of Christian religion in his childhood seemed to have passed completely into oblivion. His creed was to satisfy all his desires and he now proceeded to babble to me about Dora Demerest whom he already saw squatting, naked, in a corner of the big hut with the black women acting as her handmaidens.

"You will live here," he said to me. "You will not venture out because my men will spear you instantly if they find you at large. You will tell me more about this King Chaka and his Zulus. I go now to make preparations for the great feast to-night."

He rose and strode out of the hut. Immediately the four black women

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crawled in and took up positions in the four corners of the house from which they stared at me with great black expressionless eyes. Two of them were suckling brown picaninnies — future royalty, I supposed. I lay on the ground and the hours passed slowly. Without was a hum which gradually rose to a roar as the inhabitants of this savage capital made their arrangements for the feast for which they could thank me.

If I hadn't brought up the subject of Zulu discipline, these brutes wouldn't feast to-night upon roast coward. It made my flesh crawl to think of it. Even if I had reciprocated the hatred that Dora Demerest unreasonably bore toward me, I would have been horror-struck at the thought of the girl falling into the hands of this white savage. And it came upon me that such a fate might easily befall her unless I made my escape and warned Preudholm exactly what our company was up against.

How to escape? If I made a move toward the exit these black squaws would howl the alarm and I would be spitted before I had gone a dozen feet. And I didn't know the way to our camp. I didn't have the slightest notion to what part of the island I had been carried.

Hours more dragged by and, by the increase of the murk in the palace, I knew that the day was drawing to a close. If I could get a glimpse of the sun I would know in what direction to proceed should I manage to get away. I rose and walked boldly toward the exit. All four of the women shouted shrilly and motioned to me to return but I ignored them. I stepped outside and immediately a huge savage appeared in front of me and presented the point of a sharpened stake at my breast.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

The American Menu

HOW ham and eggs, corned beef and cabbage, wheat cakes and sausages and other tasty food combinations were first "mated" in the past has ever been a constant source of interest to your true epicure. One of America's most famous dishes, chicken and rice, is traceable to an important international incident during the administration of President Fillmore.

American whaling ships operating off the Kurile Islands were often in need of supplies and assistance, but the Japanese warned them away from the islands. Commodore Perry, brother of the victor of the battle of Lake Erie, was Fillmore's answer. He was ordered to set sail with a U. S. squadron for Japan, the kingdom with the "closed door." The warships presented a formidable sight, but the mission was tempered with foresight. A great variety of presents was brought for the emperor and his high officials. A miniature locomotive with passenger coach, clocks, whisky and potatoes were among the gifts.

Not to be outdone in courtesy, the emperor offered presents to the United States Government. Among these gifts were 250 bushels of rice and 300 chickens. Cooked, these two foods were served together to the sailors, and thus was introduced to the American menu the dish of chicken with rice.

C. W. Levere.

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MEN OF DARING
By Stookie Allen
A MASTER OF MEN AND OF NATURE!
BARTLETT HAS BEEN SHIP-WRECKED 12 TIMES; 4 TIMES HE HAS SEEN HIS OWN SHIPS CRUSHED TO PIECES IN THE ICE - YET HE LOVES THE SEA AS A DOG LOVES ITS MASTER. BORN AT BRIGUS, NEWFOUNDLAND, HE CAME OF AN OLD LINE OF SEA CAPTAINS WHO TRACED THEIR HISTORY BACK TO THE DAY OF DRAKE. THEY WERE CALLED "THE BLACK BARTLETTS OF BRIGUS." (BECAUSE OF THEIR DARK SKIN).
CAPTAIN BOB BARTLETT
HE WAS MEANT FOR THE MINISTRY BUT THE SEA CALLED AND HE JOINED HIS FATHER'S SEALING FLEET. HE SHOWED SUCH BRAVERY IN THE STORMS ENCOUNTERED THAT HE WAS PUT IN COMMAND OF A SCHOONER AT 17.' AT 18 HE LEFT HIS FATHER TO SAIL BEFORE THE MAST SO AS TO GET HIS PAPERS FOR A CAPTAINCY. HIS FIRST JOB WAS ON A BOAT CARRYING BANANAS FROM THE SOUTH SEAS. THEY WERE SHIPWRECKED OFF OF CAPE RACE.
FOR HOURS HE CLUNG TO A SPAR IN THE COLD WATER. IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF MANY ADVENTURES FOR HIM.
HE WAS COMMANDER OF THE "ROOSEVELT" ON PEARY'S FEARLESS EXPEDITIONS TO FIND THE POLE. AFTER FIGHTING UNBEARABLE ODDS IN 1905 IN AN UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT HE AND PEARY STARTED AGAIN IN 1906. BARTLETT MORE THAN ANY OTHER MAN WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR PEARY'S SUCCESS... HE TOOK HIS SHIP CLOSER TO THE POLE THAN ANY OTHER HAD EVER BEEN... AND WITH A DOG TEAM HE KEPT SUPPLIES GOING TO PEARY UNTIL THEY FOUND THE POLE! THE FIRST EVER TO TURN THE TRICK!

This feature appears in ARGOSY every week

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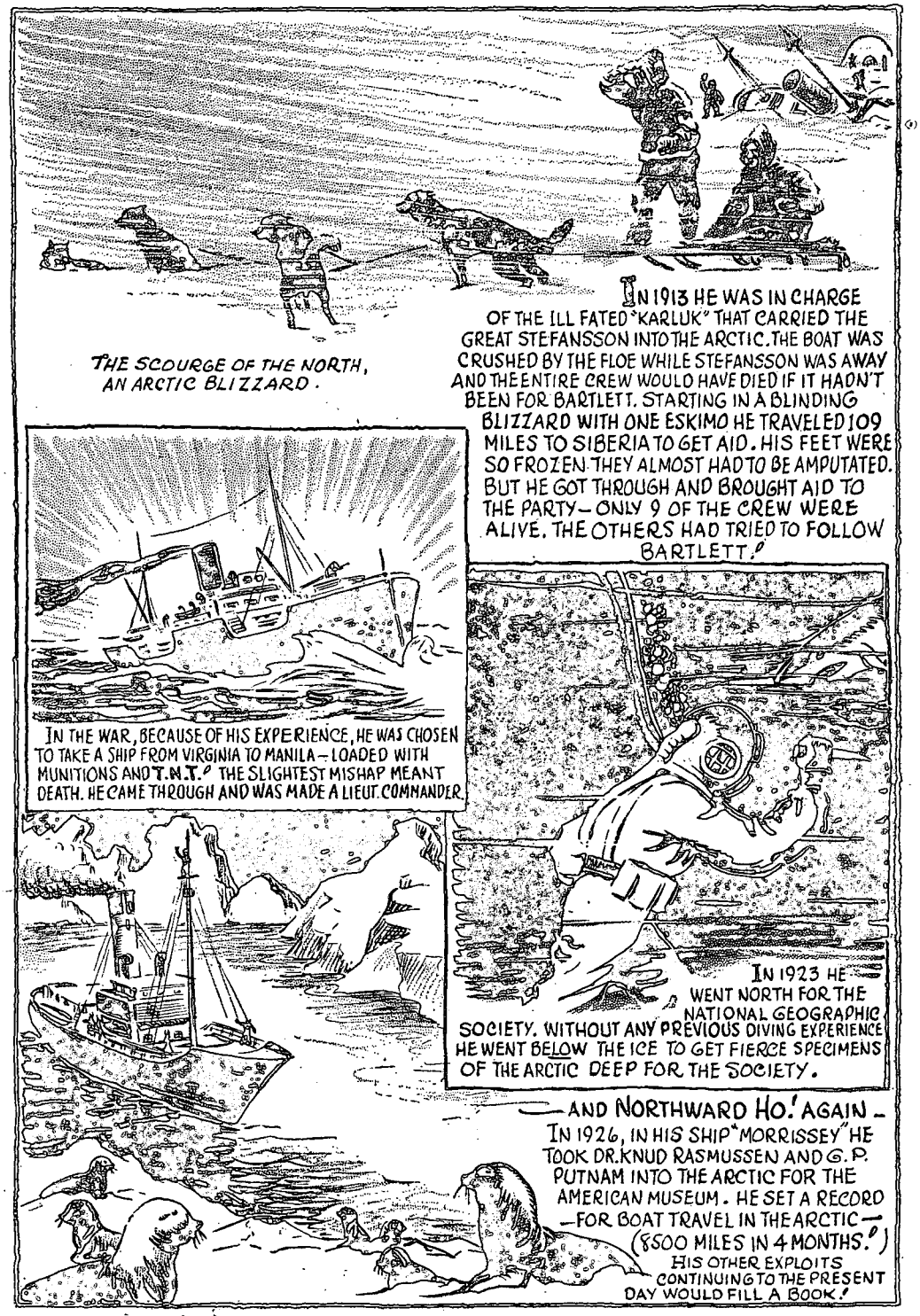
THE SCOURGE OF THE NORTH, AN ARCTIC BLIZZARD.
IN 1913 HE WAS IN CHARGE OF THE ILL FATED "KARLUK" THAT CARRIED THE GREAT STEFANSSON INTO THE ARCTIC. THE BOAT WAS CRUSHED BY THE FLOE WHILE STEFANSSON WAS AWAY AND THE ENTIRE CREW WOULD HAVE DIED IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR BARTLETT. STARTING IN A BLINDING BLIZZARD WITH ONE ESKIMO HE TRAVELED 109 MILES TO SIBERIA TO GET AID. HIS FEET WERE SO FROZEN THEY ALMOST HAD TO BE AMPUTATED. BUT HE GOT THROUGH AND BROUGHT AID TO THE PARTY — ONLY 9 OF THE CREW WERE ALIVE. THE OTHERS HAD TRIED TO FOLLOW BARTLETT!
IN THE WAR, BECAUSE OF HIS EXPERIENCE, HE WAS CHOSEN TO TAKE A SHIP FROM VIRGINIA TO MANILA — LOADED WITH MUNITIONS AND T.N.T.! THE SLIGHTEST MISHAP MEANT DEATH. HE CAME THROUGH AND WAS MADE A LIEUT. COMMANDER.
IN 1923 HE WENT NORTH FOR THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY. WITHOUT ANY PREVIOUS DIVING EXPERIENCE HE WENT BELOW THE ICE TO GET FIERCE SPECIMENS OF THE ARCTIC DEEP FOR THE SOCIETY.
— AND NORTHWARD HO! AGAIN — IN 1926, IN HIS SHIP "MORRISSEY" HE TOOK DR. KNUD RASMUSSEN AND G. P. PUTNAM INTO THE ARCTIC FOR THE AMERICAN MUSEUM. HE SET A RECORD — FOR BOAT TRAVEL IN THE ARCTIC — (8500 MILES IN 4 MONTHS.!)
HIS OTHER EXPLOITS CONTINUING TO THE PRESENT DAY WOULD FILL A BOOK!

Next Week: Charles "Chinese" Gordon, Died with His Boots On

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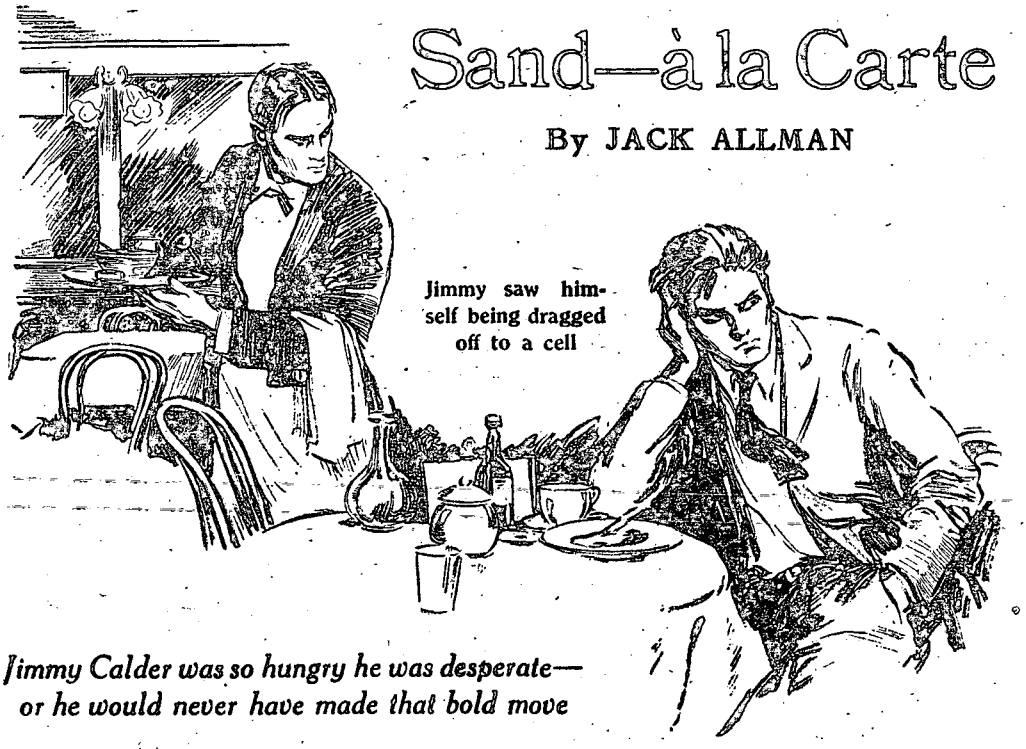
Sand—à la Carte

By JACK ALLMAN



Jimmy saw himself being dragged off to a cell

Jimmy Calder was so hungry he was desperate—or he would never have made that bold move

THOUGH the sun had not yet found its way down into the deep cañons of Manhattan's mid-forties the roar of the waking city filled the air.

"L" trains rumbled down the overhead structure on Sixth Avenue. Blaring taxi horns cleared right-of-way through loads of produce and milk trucks fighting for places at the curbs. Garbage cans clattered, and insistent street car bells added their monotone to the medley.

It was all still a little bewildering to Jimmy Calder as he jumped from the path of a hurrying scenery truck that came tearing out of the theater district. It was a little terrifying after the quiet peace of his native up-state village—not exactly what he had expected when he had stood his twenty years up against the more mature judgment of his father and declared his intention of going to the city and making a name for himself.

During the past forty-eight hours—ever since his last meal—he had grudgingly admitted to himself that there had been words of wisdom spoken during that angry scene, but the admission in no way shook his determination to keep the truth of his failure from the folks at home.

As he made his way toward the next big green refuse can fastened to a lamp post, he told himself he'd die first. A quick glance into the metal barrel told him the uselessness of further search in that particular container. It was still a little too early to pick up a discarded morning paper, but then there might be a chance. He headed for the next one.

A look of expectation lighted his face as he reached it. His hand darted in and hauled out a crumpled bundle,

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and then disappointment hardened his features. Yesterday's paper, and one of the want ads had sent him on a futile hike clear down into the wholesale district. He threw it back and turned away sharply to bump into a hurrying figure.

The man took the toothpick from his mouth and bawled him out for not looking where he was going. Jim studied the back of the fellow as he rushed on.

"Can you beat that?" he mused. "And on a full stomach, too. Probably hurrying to work—why, that fellow should be smiling at the world." He started for the refuse can up the block, but his eye was arrested by a near-by window.

UNCONSCIOUSLY, Jimmy took up a hole in his belt as he stood watching a cook in spotless white arranging thick steaks and chops, and crisp green vegetables on a bed of cracked ice. Behind the cook a fleshy blond man was placing red and white celluloid letters on a large black felt board.

HAM, 2 EGGS, ANY STYLE
TOAST & COFFEE, 40c.

Jimmy sighed and fingered the empty corners of his trouser pockets as he read off the first item. "Might just as well be forty dollars," he thought.

He glanced on down the list and imagined himself sinking his teeth into one of those thick steaks. He recalled the heavily laden tables his mother used to set. Suddenly he was overwhelmed with such hunger that the faintness which had been creeping up on him for the past twelve hours was forgotten in the determination to get something to eat if he had to steal it.

He watched the man in the window, his eyes bright with the first signal of fever. He stiffened his weakening knees as a wild scheme popped into his head. He took an uncertain step toward the door, and then stopped to reconsider.

Was he crazy to even contemplate such a thing? And he answered his own question with another. Was he going to stand there on the street and starve, with thousands of well-fed people passing by? No! He'd be darned if he would. He'd get a good meal under his belt and then go out and run down a job some place—somehow. The lines of his jaw hardened, and before he knew it he was inside.

Vaguely conscious that he was the only customer in the white tiled and freshly painted restaurant, he took a chair at the first table and sat down.

A rubber heeled waiter appeared from somewhere. Jimmy gave his order and edged the menu back between the full new catsup bottle and the glistening sugar bowl.

While he waited, he feasted his eyes on a pyramid of fresh fruit and a tray of assorted breakfast buns that covered a table near the cash register. The fragrant odor of steaming coffee caused him to run an anticipatory tongue over his hungry lips.

Sure he could get away with it! Why not? When he got through eating he'd simply step up and tell the boss that he didn't have any money. He'd offer to do some work to pay for his meal. What could be fairer than that?

The more Jimmy thought about it the more he wondered why he hadn't done it long before. No need of a man who is willing to work to go without food for forty-eight hours. He let a satisfied grin wipe out the lines of fatigue that seamed his face. He'd

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never be two days late for breakfast again.

WITH the order before him, Jimmy Calder settled himself more comfortably in his chair. He tried not to appear hurried as he picked up his knife and fork, but the waiter hadn't finished asking him if he wanted his coffee now or later before the first tasty mouthful of food was warming him.

He chewed it slowly, extracting every bit of pleasure he could get from it. He swallowed it reluctantly. Nothing he had ever eaten tasted half so good. "All a fellow needs is a little sand to get by," he told himself. "New York's no different than any place else in the world; it's those without any sand in their gizzards that get beat."

It was during his enjoyment of the fourth or fifth mouthful that he happened to look up and see the policeman standing looking in the window. He saw him nod his head to the fat German-looking man who was still working at his sign and then mosey on down the street.

The realization suddenly came to him that there might be a law against ordering food and eating it without the money to pay when finished. "Come to think of it," he reasoned, "they would have to have one."

By the time he had mulled that over in his mind for a few moments the food in his mouth had lost most of its exquisite flavor. He wondered what the penalty for such an offense would be in case the restaurant man had him arrested.

Jail, he knew; but how long? Before his eyes there appeared a picture that caused a shiver to run up and down his spine. He saw himself being dragged off to a cell. He tried to swallow and almost choked.

Having had no more experience with the law than that of a village constable twisting his ear for carving his initials in one of the schoolyard trees, Jimmy's imagination ran riot. He recalled the recent newspaper cry to get the petty crooks and put them away before they could get a foothold and become powerful gangsters.

He pictured himself being held up as an example for others. He saw his name in the papers and cursed the letters in his pocket that would identify him and tell the police where he was from. The story would be in the home papers and his mother would almost die with shame.

With an effort he managed to swallow the tasteless piece of meat on which he had been chewing. He lost all interest in the meal when the policeman again passed the window. He ran a nervous hand over his forehead and didn't even notice that it came away wet. He sat for a long time looking off into space—a victim of his imagination.

At last he became aware of the fact that the proprietor had finished his sign and was staring at him fixedly. He took another hurried mouthful of food. It tasted like ashes. His hand trembled till the fork rattled against his teeth.

With each bite that he took, the warm nourishment in his stomach robbed him of just that much of the hunger prompted courage that had seated him at the table. He paid for the meal in torture a thousand times during the next few minutes, then he shoved the plate away.

No use! He couldn't swallow another bite. He steeled himself to face the music and pushed back his chair.

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He took a step toward the cash register where the man was now painting something on a piece of cardboard.

His mouth went suddenly powder dry. He turned back and gulped the rest of the water in his glass. The last excuse for delay gone, he made his way to the desk. His heart seemed to have stopped beating. He was cold and clammy all over.

THE fat man looked up with a smile. Jimmy opened his mouth a couple of times in an effort to blurt out his confession, but before words came the man was out from behind the desk and shaking his hand.

"Mein frendt," he was saying, "I hope you der meal enchoyed, und I vish you your friends vould tell. You are der first gustomer in dis, mein new restaurant, und always in a restaurant for der first gustomer der meal iss free." His round pink face was one happy Teutonic smile. "Haff a cigar, too, or maype some cigarettes," he insisted affably.

Jimmy gulped a couple of times as the meaning of the man's words became clear. He recovered himself enough to return the pressure of a pudgy hand gripping his ice cold fingers. Then his eyes fell on the card the German had been painting with ink. The words stood before his happy eyes in letters ten feet tall:

DISHWASHER WANTED

Within a minute he had the job. It wasn't anything like he had planned when he left the little up-state village, but it was at least honest work and the folks at home need never know. He could find something better later. He turned around just in time to see the waiter start to clean up his table.

"Hey there!" he called. "Hold everything! I'm not finished yet. Just over here talking to the boss for a minute."

After he had polished his plate and drained his third cup of coffee, Jimmy Calder told himself that a fellow with plenty of sand can get by all right, but that a little luck thrown in was sometimes a mighty big help.

THE END.

The Mississippi Delta

THE geological formation of the Mississippi delta is very unusual. The silt and clay formation of the soil is hundreds of feet thick, without a hard-pan or rock foundation. Countless overflows have built the country up to its present level.

In boring for artesian water, buried logs have been struck at various depths. In Leflore County, Mississippi, the bit penetrated a log at a depth of more than 500 feet, which probably shows that in past ages great forests grew hundreds of feet beneath the present level of the country.

J. E. Greer.

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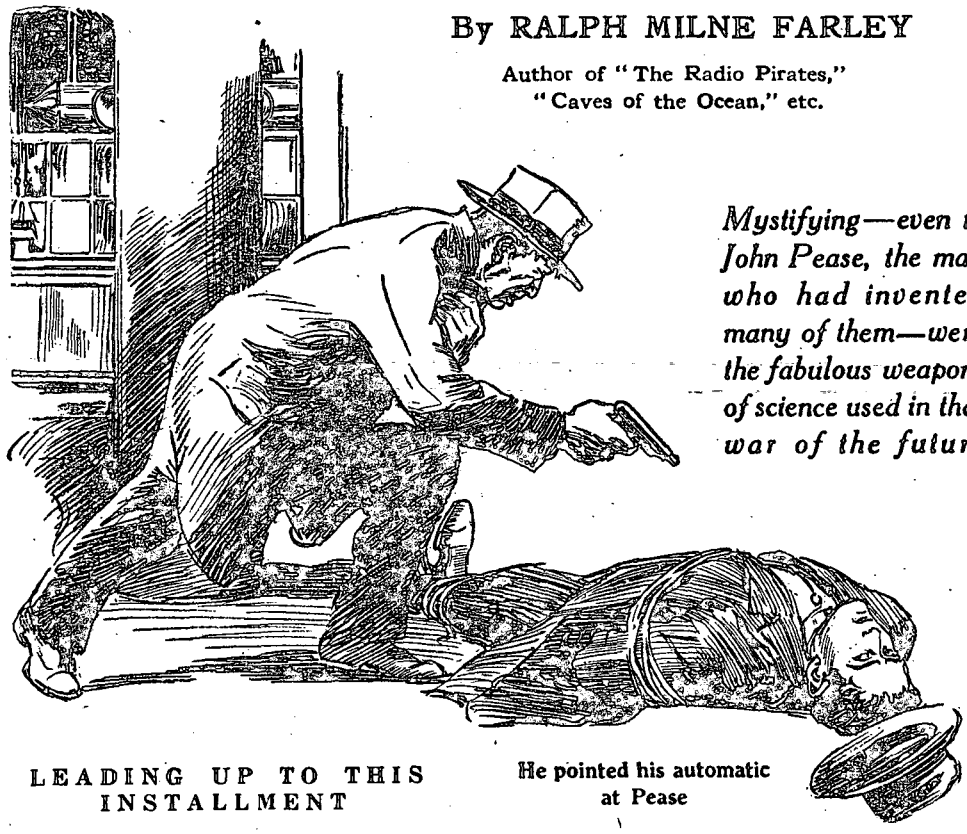
The Radio War

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Author of "The Radio Pirates," "Caves of the Ocean," etc.

Mystifying—even to John Pease, the man who had invented many of them—were the fabulous weapons of science used in that war of the future



He pointed his automatic at Pease

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

IN the year 2000, Soviet Siberia, almost without warning, lays siege to the United States. Secret enemy camps are discovered within the very borders of the country, but the Siberian forces are forced to retire to the base camp, hidden in Canada, in violation of Canadian neutrality.

An American, Captain John Pease, is assistant to the scientist Ray Forrest, an ex-professor who has recently been appointed Secretary of National Defense by President Benson of the United States; and it is while Pease is a prisoner in the camp of the Siberians that he comes to know the enemy's commanding officer, Colonel Kachurin. Colonel Kachurin is the son of the Kachurin who is Kommissar of all the Soviets, and two who are closest to him are the shifty Major Plotnicoff and the latter's mistress, Comrade Anna Soodakova, a Siberian spy. Most important of all, Pease meets Miss June Stevens, daughter of the Canadian premier, and like Pease himself, a prisoner of the Siberians.

When at last the Canadians attack the Siberians, the latter's marvellous scientific protective devices save them from any great damage, even though they are in the end forced to withdraw.

This story began in the Argosy for July 2.

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Kachurin takes June Stevens with him, but Pease, who is wounded, they leave in camp. And eventually the Canadians return the American to his own country, where he is placed in a New York hospital. Major Plotnicoff and the Soodakova woman are taken prisoner by the Canadians, but the woman escapes.

It is by means of television in the hospital that Pease watches the bombardment of the very city in which he is located.

Siberian long range guns are finally located on the island of Martha's Vineyard, where the enemy has succeeded in landing planes and troops from giant submarines. A night air attack on New York is repulsed, and the same thing happens at Boston. Then the Siberian base is attacked and wiped out, the hero of this attack being the commander of a strange and powerful airship, John Hays Hammond, IV. Colonel Kachurin's body is found, but Pease has some doubt that it is really that of the Siberian officer. And safe in a bomb-proof underground shelter, June Stevens is found unharmed.

Almost at the same time, the enemy attacks and captures San Francisco. For as it happens, the entire United States fleet is in the Atlantic, and since the Siberians have destroyed the Panama Canal, the fleet is unable to reach the Pacific Coast, *via* Cape Horn, in time, thus leaving San Francisco unguarded by the Navy.

Because this amazing war is essentially a war of science, the most fabulous and unbelievable modern devices and weapons are constantly being used by both sides. No one knows quite what turn this strange warfare will take next. Astounding improvements have been made upon [illegible]s of all sorts. The sciences of avi[illegible]n, radio, television, and so on, have all been put to remarkable uses.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOR CONTROL OF THE SEAS.

IT was true. In all the excitement, John Pease had entirely forgotten about his wounded leg. From now on he could be regarded as cured.

The infantry lieutenant dispatched one of his men on a run to the medical detachment, and soon a stretcher appeared for June Stevens. She was carted to the hospital tent, which had already been set up to treat the wounded survivors of the Siberians.

Pease started to follow the stretcher, but the colonel called him back, with the announcement, "Come on over here, captain. An orderly has just reported that they have found the body of that Russian Catch-as-catch-can, or whatever his name is, that you were looking for. We want you to identify the corpse for us."

So Pease, with one long look at the still form of the girl on the departing stretcher, obeyed his superior.

Both of them followed the orderly, who was explaining, "It's funny, sir. Once before we'd looked at the spot where we found this body, and we could swear that it wasn't there before."

"Impossible!" replied the colonel. "That is, unless old Cough-Drops was in hiding somewhere, and has just now crawled there and died."

"You can determine that," suggested Pease, "by sending for a medical corps officer."

Just then they reached the body, and dispatched the orderly for a doctor.

Pease recognized the uniform at once; the simple green uniform of an

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officer of the Siberian Soviet Republic, with its single medal of the order of St. Lenin. The body was contorted in an agonized position, and was quite stiff and cold. The face was covered with clotted blood, and there was a gaping bullet hole in the forehead.

Pease sighed. In spite of the fact that this man had been an enemy and a rival, Pease had had a sneaking liking for him.

"It's Kachurin, all right," he announced. "His face looks a bit queer on account of all that blood, but I could never mistake that uniform with its lone medal."

The American colonel was elated. "This will be quite a feather in our caps," said he, "for he was the most important Soviet officer on American soil; and I understand that he was a son of the head Commissary of all Siberia. Am I right?"

"Quite," Pease agreed.

JUST then a medical officer arrived, and was directed to begin an examination of the corpse.

"I should say," he reported, "that this man has been dead for several days."

"How is Miss Stevens?" Pease asked.

"She has come out of it nicely," the medico replied. "A bad wound in the head, which had been dressed rather well, though quite some time ago. It needed attention. When she came to, she asked for Captain Pease. Is there any one of that name around here?"

"Is there!" Pease exclaimed. He set out as fast as he could for the hospital tent.

June Stevens was sitting up, feeling much better, when he reached her. Each told the other all that had happened since that dinner—it seemed years ago—in Colonel Kachurin's headquarters in northern Pennsylvania.

She related that the pig-faced Siberian Major Plotnicoff had succeeded in persuading her that there was some danger that Colonel Kachurin might fraternize with the Americans and give the whole show away. So, overcoming her revulsion for the brute, and at that time having been misled into the belief that her own country, Canada, was in the war on the Siberian side, she consented to accompany him in a mad dash to the Canadian headquarters of the Soviet army. Just what was Plotnicoff's intention in this move would never be known, for Kachurin reached Canada ahead of him, as Pease knew, of course, and forestalled him.

Miss Stevens had been kept in the guardhouse until Kachurin had let her out. Then he had dragged her to his plane just before his departure. The shot fired by Mlle. Soodakova had barely creased the Canadian girl's skull, knocking her unconscious and inflicting a bad wound, but doing no permanent harm.

On their arrival on Martha's Vineyard, Soviet doctors dressed her wound, and Kachurin kept her locked up in a room in his quarters, until the underground stronghold would be built, whereupon she was transferred there. During the last day of the fighting she saw no one after Kachurin called on her early in the morning. She had nothing to eat, nor was her wound dressed.

Her father, Premier Stevens of Canada, was now notified of her safety, and arrangements were made to send her at once to New York by ambulance plane. Captain Pease was sent along too, as his exertions had set his wounded leg back considerably.

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Meanwhile, flying ordnance heavy mobile machine shops began arriving to repair the dirigible Squamscott and the anti-aircraft guns of the Siberians, for it was decided to fortify the island against a repetition of its capture by the enemy. Also, a group of scientists from the technical staff arrived to study what remained of the two big guns, and to attempt to find out what new principle it was that enabled them to fire so silently.

JUST as Pease and Miss Stevens were about to make their departure, Pease caught the eye of a tall, dark American enlisted man, who was looking at him with a rather strange expression. As soon as Pease glanced up, the enlisted man turned away. At the same moment, the girl clutched Pease's arm convulsively.

Just then the lieutenant who had commanded the operations at the bombing of the dugout, passed by. Pease beckoned hurriedly to him; and, pointing at the departing soldier, whispered, "Watch that man!"

"Why?" asked the lieutenant.

"He looked at me queerly just [illegible]," said Pease. "Besides, he resembles Kachurin closely enough to be his twin brother. If I hadn't seen Kachurin's dead body with my own eyes, I'd swear that this American soldier was the Siberian colonel himself."

"I saw him, too," added Miss Stevens, "and he certainly gave me a bad minute. He does look like Nikolai—"

Pease winced at hearing her call the Siberian by his first name.

"—but I can see that it is not he," she continued.

"Well, neither of you need be alarmed," replied the lieutenant with a laugh, "for that enlisted man happens to be a member of my own outfit. He has been in the army ten years, three of them with me. Perfect record. His name is Jarvis."

"What else do you know about him?" asked Pease, still persistent.

"Nothing before he joined up, if that's what you mean. He was captured by the Siberians two days ago, while scouting, and was found here in prison when our men took over. It's a wonder the enemy didn't kill him."

"Yes, isn't it?" Pease agreed.

He made a mental note to have Washington check up on Jarvis's past, but he said no more of the matter to the man's commanding officer.

Then he and Miss Stevens boarded the hospital plane for New York.

THE next day June Stevens and Pease were comfortably ensconced in the same army hospital where he had been before. They rested comfortably and filled in to each other more details of their individual adventures. Preston Ross, Pease's newscasting reporter friend, showed up for an interview, and was duly presented. He and the girl took an instant liking to each other.

June and Pease were watching the televisiphone that afternoon when suddenly the screen blurred, to clear in an instant and show the familiar face of the popular newscaster, Tom Lowell.

"Forgive me, friends of the radio audience," said he, "for cutting in on the last scene, but the A. B. C. correspondent with the American fleet has just tuned in on our laboratories by short wave length. He announces that scout planes have located enemy ships ahead. Our newsship is accordingly oiling away from the fleet, and is preparing to send up a recording plane. The news will be re-broadcast over the A. B. C. network. We shall now switch

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you onto Gib Floyd, with the American fleet in the South Pacific. Remember, our four wave lengths are one thousand one hundred, one thousand one hundred and thirteen, one thousand one hundred and fifteen and one-half and one thousand one hundred and twenty-two."

Tom Lowell's face was succeeded by the grinning face of Gib Floyd, best known war correspondent in two hemispheres.

"Hello, folks," he announced. "This is Gib Floyd speaking, on board the radio recording ship, Edison. We're 'somewhere on the ocean.' You all might perhaps have guessed that little fact, since we're on a boat, but this is all the information that our dear old admiral will let us give you as to our whereabouts. Anyhow, it's now eleven-ten Pacific Standard Time. When you hear the sound of the musical note, it'll mean that this boat has been hit by an enemy shell. Our news recording plane is now up, and our boat is oiling rapidly westward, diverging from the fleet. I'll now give you a close-up of the fleet, by the telephoto lens."

There followed, in rapid succession, views of various American battleships.

"Sorry, folks," apologized the voice of Gib Floyd, "but I'm not permitted to name these craft to you, nor show you more than one at a time, lest the enemy, who are undoubtedly listening in on this newscast, might learn the disposition of our fighting ships. But I have no qualms about showing you the disposition of the enemy."

THE scene changed, and became dim and almost indistinct; a view of a hazy horizon, with what appeared to be a row of water spouts or spiraling tornadoes.

As if reading the thoughts of the radio audience, Gib Floyd announced, "Those aren't water spouts; they're columns of smoke from the Siberian fleet. Visibility is poor. Sorry we can't give the picture to you folks any clearer, but this is our longest range telephoto lens, and it is perfectly focussed."

"Say, by the way," broke in one of the audience in the New York hospital, "how come there are any ships of the Siberian fleet left over to send to the South Pacific? The newscasters have told us that the Siberians showed up off Frisco with about three times as many warships as any one ever supposed that nation owned!"

It *was* a poser. No one could answer him.

Evidently somewhat the same thought was in the mind of Gib Floyd, for he announced, "There seem to be very few ships in the enemy fleet; or perhaps they have done what we have done, replaced some of their old fashioned coal burners with Doble engines. They had a great many ships off San Francisco, but now it appears that they have at least a few left over."

The lens of the newscaster remained fixed on the dim horizon; and at last it was possible to make out the forms of the enemy ships: a battle line of destroyers, followed by three airplane carriers. Floyd pointed out these ships by superimposing two crossed wires on his lens, and then shifting his aim so that the exact intersection of the wires rested successively on each of the objects which he wished to indicate.

"That means that we'll be outnumbered in the air," he said, "for there are only *two* carriers with our fleet. The old question of air versus water is going to be settled again. This is going to be interesting."

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"I thought he was going to say, 'This is going to be *good*,' you know!" whispered Pease to Miss Stevens.

She clutched his arm and looked at him appealingly. Then he remembered that he had forgotten to ask Washington to check up on the past record of that private, named Jarvis, who had borne such a remarkable resemblance to the dead Siberian, Colonel Kachurin.

He turned his attention back to the screen.

"Here they come!" announced Gib Floyd, as a series of black specks could be seen rising, one by one, from each of the enemy airplane carriers. "Listen!"

The distant drone of motors came from the loud speaker. Soon the enemy airplanes could be made out, advancing in bombing formation.

Gib Floyd spoke again, "Don't forget, folks, that you are seeing with the eye of a telephoto lens. It will be many minutes before the enemy fliers come within striking distance; and so, in the meantime, I'm going to switch you to the plotting room of our flag ship, and show you how big guns are aimed at sea."

THE scenery abruptly shifted to a white-painted steel-beamed room in the bowels of a warship. The crossed wires of the lens pointed out the various computing instruments, and the voice of Gib Floyd explained how the data of speed and direction of both a U. S. and an enemy ship, the direction and velocity of the wind, the temperature and barometric readings, were constantly fed into these gyroscopic computing machines. This data was digested by the mechanism with superhuman precision, so that the American guns were kept pointed and elevated in such a way that whenever the firing button was pushed by an officer in the fighting top or on the bridge, a hit would be scored—at least within the limits of dispersion.

America had been the first to adopt this system, nearly a hundred years earlier, just before the World War, and in the development of this system had kept ahead of all the world ever since.

"How did Floyd get down into the plotting room of the ship so quickly?" asked Pease. "And why do they permit a newscast from there, in the midst of a battle?"

"He didn't, and they don't," replied his old friend the artillery officer with whom he had viewed the repulse of the air attack on New York some time back. "That's a news reel, taken months ago, just so as to be handy to fill in gaps in a battle such as this promises to be."

The lecture on the plotting room over, the scene shifted back to the oncoming enemy aircraft, and Gib Floyd announced a bit hesitantly:

"For some reason, our Navy hasn't yet sent up a single plane. In fact, our two carriers have dropped back of the fleet, and have come to anchor. We are forbidden to show the American fleet for the present, but," and there came a ring of excitement in his voice, "if you could see what I can see, you would be very much interested."

THE scene shifted to the line of enemy destroyers.

"They are discharging torpedoes," came the announcement. "Now we shift to the eye of our plane, and show you what America does to enemy torpedoes."

The view changed to a small, rakish craft speeding through the waves. Two rods projected from the front of this

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boat, extending down into the water at a gentle angle.

"A torpedo catcher," announced the loud speaker. "These boats carry delicate under-water sound-ranging apparatus which enables them to keep track of the position of each oncoming enemy torpedo."

There came a spout of water, some distance in advance of the little boat on the screen. Immediately there was great activity on deck. The two forward shafts were disconnected, and another set run out in their stead.

"Caught one!" announced the loud speaker laconically. Then, "Now we will show you an enemy boat catching one."

A similar boat, bound in the opposite direction, flashed onto the screen. Immediately a string of signal flags fluttered up on to the mast of the little craft.

"They're warning us not to newscast them," explained the announcer. "But their warning is a violation of international law, as the Siberian Admiral has not yet notified us officially of the imposition of any censorship. If they try to stop us, we'll use our machine guns on them—I hope they were tuned in on that little message."

Again, as in the case of the American torpedo catcher, there came a spout of water a safe distance in advance of the little craft on the screen. But this was immediately followed by a second blast, which blew the bow clean off the boat. The boat pitched forward and rapidly sank.

"Well," announced Gib Floyd, with a touch of glee in his voice, "I said to watch them catch it, and they certainly did. Either our torpedos hunt in pairs, or else the American navy has developed some sort of delayed double burst. This is worse than trying to figure out the penalties in a basket ball game. And now let's see what the Siberian bombing planes are doing."

THE scene of floating wreckage and swimming enemy sailors changed to the cloud-strewn sky. Twelve huge bombing planes, flying in double formation. No bursts of anti-aircraft fire among them. One of them suddenly uptilted, sideways, and dropped into a perfect side slip.

The lens of the newscaster followed it down. At last the plane straightened out into a nose dive; yet still there was no evidence of hostile fire.

"It's the old hell-diver stunt, which has proved so effective for the past hundred years," announced the voice of Gib Floyd. "An air force expects to lose fifty per cent of its planes in such a maneuver. But the bombs can't miss, and what's the loss of a plane if you sink a battleship?" Yet for some strange reason, his voice did not sound at all sad at the prospect.

The diving plane loosed a bomb, and then straightened out and soared up and away. The scene shifted back to the American battleship. The bomb exploded in the air above the ship; and, at the same instant, all the batteries on one side of the ship let loose. Quickly the scene shifted back to the fleeing plane, which suddenly was enveloped in the white smoke of a dozen shell bursts, out of which an unrecognizable mass of crumpled metal dropped into the sea.

"Nets to protect our decks," announced the jubilant voice of Gib Floyd, "and quick-aiming six-inch guns, with which to retaliate. If the enemy can bomb point-blank, we can fire back point-blank in return."

Again the American battleship was shown on the screen. Airplane after airplane of the enemy hell-dived at it,

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discharging bombs. But its protecting net overhung its sides so greatly, that even those bombs which were intended to produce a devastating underwater concussion exploded harmlessly long before they reached the surface of the sea.

But the protecting net was by now torn asunder in a score of places, and so the anti-aircraft guns on the warship got into play. The enemy planes had been flying closer and closer, not expecting this. The result was that several were shot down before they could loose their bombs; and those that followed were kept at such a distance that they could not aim accurately at the rents in the net.

"Score so far," announced the loud speaker, "thirty-two planes shot down *after* bombing, four shot down *before* bombing, five which made their getaway. No hits!—Very similar score in the attack on each of our other vessels."

A pause ensued, then, "I don't know that I ought to announce this, but some of those enemy planes look as though they ought to be marked 'Made in Japan,' and through my telescope I can see, on the under side of the wings of one of them what seems to be the hastily painted out rising sun of Nippon."

At this moment the scene blurred, and the face of Tom Lowell appeared on the screen. It looked perturbed, and lacked his usual happy smile.

"Friends of the radio audience," he said. "You have been switched back to the A. B. C. studios for an important —a serious—announcement. Japanese troops from the Republic of Lower California have crossed the border at Tia Juana, and are attacking San Diego in overwhelming force."

"That explains where all the extra warships came from!" Pease exclaimed.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NEW WEAPON.

AMERICA promptly declared war upon Japan, but it was an idle gesture. Japan was already at war with the U. S. As ever, the Japanese had struck first, and were prepared to talk about it afterwards, if at all.

Meanwhile, the naval battle—air against water—continued in the South Pacific.

All this while the leading American warships had been creeping up on the three airplane carriers of the Japs—until now erroneously assumed to belong to the allies of the Siberians. These three enemy ships had made no attempt to flee, evidently relying on the supposedly obvious superiority of their air forces.

And then, suddenly, the sixteen- and eighteen-inch guns on the forward turrets of our super-dreadnaughts broke loose. The big guns on the three enemy ships promptly replied, but it was too late. They were out-ranged, out-numbered, out-aimed and out-guessed. Within ten minutes all three of the enemy airplane carriers were out of control, drifting aimlessly and settling rapidly.

The sky was still filled with enemy fliers, but now they had no place to replenish their supply of bombs; no place even to which they might return, when through fighting.

Then, and not until then, did the American aircraft take to the air. Like a swarm of angry hornets, they rose from their two carriers and charged at the scattered Jap fliers. In a far-flung line, they swung around the enemy,

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herding them together and driving them over the American fleet, where the anti-aircraft guns took frightful toll.

Meanwhile the heavier of the American airships pursued the Japanese destroyers and torpedo catchers; and flying low, bombed them one by one.

The newsgathering airplane of the A. B. C. and the telephoto lens on the news boat followed this fighting, skipping from incident to incident, while the voice of Gib Floyd, premier of newscasters, grew husky with the strain.

The last survivors of the Japanese bombing planes were being chased off to all points of the compass, when suddenly the screen went black. There was a minute's pause, and then the face of Tom Lowell appeared, to announce, "A dispatch has just come in from Admiral Napier. One of the departing Japs bombed the A. B. C. boat, and another one shot down our plane. This was pure spite, and will be duly reported to Geneva."

Another pause, then, "Another bulletin: Gib Floyd has just been fished out of the water by the D-93. He's okay, and sends greetings to 'all you folks,' as he phrases it. He regrets that he can't greet you in person from the screen, but the D-93 has no television set."

Thus ended the naval battle of the South Pacific. The American fleet proceeded westward, destination unknown.

DURING the next few days, John Pease chafed at the inactivity of his confinement in the New York military hospital, in spite of the pleasurable company of June Stevens.

Meanwhile, the Japanese army from Lower California captured San Diego and Los Angeles, and swept northward; for they were possessed of a new weapon: a one-man tank. Some of these tanks carried fifty-caliber machine guns, and some carried one-pounders. There were thousands of these, literally thousands. Every Jap soldier had one. They overran the country like a plague of locusts. Indeed, in the bird's-eye views of them which were shown on the newscast screens, they looked exactly like myriads of loathsome bugs.

On concrete roads they could make fifty miles an hour, on rubber tires. And, in a few minutes' time they could slip caterpillar treads over their wheels, and then proceed to make ten or fifteen miles an hour cross-country.

They were heavily enough armored to be immune to machine gun attack from either the ground or the air. Bombs could destroy them, if the bombs happened to make direct hits, but there weren't enough aërial bombs in all the arsenals of America to cope with this new menace. Field artillery, firing point-blank, could stand them off; but eventually, in spite of heavy slaughter, they would swarm over any artillery position and capture it. They even contained some unknown and efficient protection against gas-attack.

And so they rapidly advanced northward, to contact the joint Siberian-Russian-Japanese forces which were by now in complete possession of the San Francisco basin.

Incidentally, it should be remarked that election day came and went, and resulted in a complete victory for President Benson and the Conservatives. Although the campaign had attracted but little footage in the newscasts, being relegated to the background by the war, nevertheless the electorate turned out en masse, and cast a mighty vote. Not only were Americans determined not to "swap horses while crossing a stream," but also they were fed up with the Fifth

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Internationale. With Soviet Russia and Soviet Siberia attacking the United States, Americans had little use for the allies of the former, the American Communists.

JOHN PEASE was finally pronounced cured, and was permitted to proceed to Washington. The head wound of June Stevens was still troubling her a bit, and so she remained behind in the hospital, which fact seemed to displease no one, except Pease, who was torn by the parting.

Pease made the trip in an army plane, and landed on top of the Army-Navy-Air Building. Washington was one of those cities which was not yet all under one roof. He took the lift down to Secretary Forrest's floor immediately, and soon was warmly shaking the hand of his old friend, whom he hadn't seen, except on the news screen, since the old secretary had been left for dead beside his captured helicopter, the first day of the war.

After their greetings were over, Forrest said, "And now, young man, I'm going to let you in on a secret. Doubtless you have heard that Rock Island and Aberdeen and several other of our arsenals have been closed to communication with the outside world, even the shop-hands being quartered on the premises."

Pease hadn't heard this, and admitted so.

"Good," replied the Secretary. "If the fact of our having quarantined the arsenals hasn't yet leaked out, there's even less likelihood of any spy finding out what's going on inside. And," he added with a chuckle, "even if the enemy did succeed in getting wind of what's going on, they would scarcely believe the information. Come into my inner office, and I'll show you."

With much ceremony, the white-bearded but virile old man led his slim young assistant through the door, carefully closing it behind them. Then he pointed to one of several glass cabinets which lined the wall.

"Exhibit one," said he.

Exhibit one appeared to be an army rifle of obsolete type, the kind that fired only five shots at a clip, and required the working of a bolt after each shot, to eject the empty cartridge and carry a new cartridge from the magazine to the chamber.

Pease ran his hand in bewilderment through his wavy black hair.

"Why! Why!" said he. "That looks to me like an old Springfield. If I remember my course at Marquette on 'The History of Small Arms,' the Springfields went out of use during the World War."

"Merely because so many American manufacturers were all set to make the Lee-Enfield, on account of having had British orders. There never was a better firearm than the Springfield."

"But certainly you aren't planning to arm our troops with these old has-beens!" Pease objected.

"Why not?" Forrest replied. "There was once a great American orator named Bryan, who lived a hundred years ago. He used to claim that 'a million men would spring to arms over night' if our nation were ever menaced by an invader. Well, he was right about the million men, but he was wrong about the arms. There aren't that many arms for our men to spring to. We must have arms. And we can turn out Springfields much faster than we can turn out machine guns, or any other sort of weapon."

"But isn't one machine gun worth as much as one hundred Springfields?" Pease continued to object. "And

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wouldn't the use of machine guns conserve our man power?"

"Yes and no," replied Forrest enigmatically. "Do you remember the first principle of land warfare laid down by the text book on military tactics which you studied at the Marquette R. O. T. C.?"

PEASE pursed up his lips in thought for a moment, then smiled and nodded.

"It went something like this," said he, "'Every branch of the service exists for one purpose, and one purpose only; namely to assist the infantry; for, until the infantry takes over, no victory is complete.'"

"Go to the head of the class," laughed his old professor. "I didn't realize that you were paying so much attention as that, in those old days back at Marquette."

"Well?" asked Pease, still perplexed.

"Applying that fundamental principle to the situation which confronts us," asserted Forrest, "simply means that, regardless of what super-modern weapons our scientists may evolve, the war must be won, in the last analysis, by infantry; infantry fighting on foot, with individual weapons. Now do you understand the pressing need for rifles; rifles above everything else?"

But his assistant was still unconvinced. "Even though what you say is true," objected the young man, "you surely plan to arm your infantry with something more modern than the old Springfield rifle."

"Certainly!" laughed the professor, grinning through his white beard. "We've adopted all the advantages of the old Springfields, with none of their disadvantages. Didn't it ever occur to you that the wooden stock of a rifle is a lot of waste weight? We've made the stocks of our new rifles out of duralumin, and hollow at that, so as to hold tandem clips of thirty cartridges each. The loading mechanism is the same as in the old automatic pistol, which was the simplest weapon ever built. Result: our new rifle will discharge thirty shots, as fast as you can pull the trigger. Also, our new design of bullet has a better form factor, and so will travel about twice as far as the former type. But otherwise it is the same old tried-and-true U. S. magazine rifle; and so we can use old dies and equipment, and turn them out with unbelievable rapidity. Just wait until our infantry takes the field! Then you'll see something!"

Forrest continued, "Keep quiet about this new weapon of mine. And now, here's something else for you to puzzle about. The situation of a million men trying to spring to arms which don't exist, is exactly reversed, when we come to the air corps. To start with, America has more planes than fliers; and our factories are turning out new planes ten times as fast as we can train men. Let's see you solve that one."

"We've got to save our men—somehow—when their planes are shot down," ruminated Pease.

"But how?—Well, think about it. I'll lunch with you in about fifteen minutes."

Forrest rang for an orderly, and instructed the man to show Pease to the desk which Pease was to occupy in one of the outer offices. This was done.

AS soon as the soldier had departed, Pease picked up his radio desk phone, and asked to be connected with the army hospital in New York.

"I'd like to speak to Miss June

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Stevens," said he. "She'll be found in Ward G."

"Sorry, sir," replied the soldier on the other end of the phone, "Miss Stevens is no longer here."

"Did she say where she was moving to?" Pease asked.

"Sorry, sir, but she didn't," the man replied.

Something in the man's tone sounded fishy to Pease.

"Give me the head surgeon," he snapped, a bit curtly.

In a few minutes he was connected with that official. After making known his identity, he again inquired for Miss Stevens, and this time received more sympathetic attention.

"Since I remember you as being a friend of hers," said the medical officer, "I'll tell you. She disappeared about an hour ago. No one saw her leave; and she didn't take her clothes with her."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Pease. "Have you notified the police?"

"Yes, and the newscasters. But I haven't heard anything about it over the air as yet."

"Thank you. If anything turns up, would you mind giving me a ring, and reverse the charges? I'm at branch two hundred and eighty-six, Army-Navy-Air Building, Washington, D. C."

He hung up, and sat for a few moments in deep, glum thought. What had become of the girl that he loved? Was she again in the clutches of the Siberians? And, if so, why? Kachurin was dead. Plotnicoff was interned in Canada. But was he? The Soodakova woman had escaped, and the pig-faced Siberian major might have done the same. Pease resolved to check up on Plotnicoff.

He was just reaching for his radio phone again, when Secretary Forrest entered the room to take him to lunch. In spite of the synthetic compressed rations which were available to every one, real meals were still eaten and enjoyed.

Not wishing to have his superior know how upset he was over the disappearance of a girl that he loved, when America was demanding all of his interest and attention, Pease assumed a forced gaiety and jovially greeted the older man.

But Forrest himself was distraught.

"Have you heard the news?" he asked. Then, without waiting for an answer, he continued, "As you doubtless know, Hawaii has been off the air for a long time. Our fleet arrived at Oahu yesterday, only to find that the native population, incited by the Japanese element, had risen in rebellion and proclaimed a soviet republic, under Japanese protectorate. Our own impregnable coast-defenses, manned by native revolutionary troops, successfully repulsed our fleet, which finally oiled away, severely crippled."

There was no longer any need for Pease to hide his personal dismay over the news from New York. He knew that Forrest would assume that it was due to the news from Honolulu.

In an attempt to cheer up the secretary, Pease's mind flashed back to the problem of how to match the oversupply of airplanes and the undersupply of aviation personnel. And suddenly he believed he had the solution. He started to sketch it out to Forrest as they walked along together toward the cafeteria.

Said he, "If we can gather together Major Hammond and some of the radio experts of the A. B. C. chain, as well as the engineers of the leading manufacturers of airplanes and radio equipment, I believe—"

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"Sh!" cautioned the secretary. "We might be overheard here. Wait until after luncheon. But I believe I catch your idea, or at least the rudiments of it."

THEY were just entering the restaurant. The hour was late, and the place was nearly deserted. A group of unoccupied waitresses were standing idly together in one corner.

As Pease swept the room with his glance, his eye fell on this group, and was instantly arrested by a familiar face. He had seen one of those girls before. But where?"

Just then she caught his eye, started slightly, and then turned away. Something in her slinking grace was strangely reminiscent, but he couldn't quite place her. He was sure he'd never seen the woman dressed in the uniform of a waitress.

As he and Forrest seated themselves, Pease asked, "Are you sure that all these girls are loyal and dependable?"

"As sure as we can be. They were carefully picked, and their records have been investigated by the secret service, like all other employees of this building. Why?"

"I've just seen a girl who—"

"Sh!" cautioned Forrest, as another girl came to take their order.

She had scarcely departed, when an orderly arrived to tell the secretary that he was wanted on the phone for a minute.

"Wait for me," said Forrest, and left with the orderly.

Pease toyed with his food and waited for the return of the old professor. His thoughts were on the lost June Stevens, whom he imagined to be in the clutches of the enemy—probably Plotnicoff. He must check up on Plotnicoff. Why not run over to the secret service room, while waiting for Forrest's return?

He called to a waitress and asked her to tell the secretary where he had gone, and that he would be back in a moment.

And then all his plans were changed by a glimpse of the mysterious girl—in coat and hat now—leaving the restaurant just ahead of him. Now that her coat concealed her waitress costume, she looked less out of place. The rippling glide of her walk was unmistakable. She was Anna Soodakova, the snake-woman of the soviets he had first seen in Canada.

Anna Soodakova, a spy in the heart of the Department of National Defense!

Instantly, Pease determined to follow her. But his army uniform rendered him too conspicuous for any sleuthing, and so, snatching up a civilian overcoat and a felt hat from the rack by the door, he went out. With collar of the coat turned up, and the hat pulled down over his eyes, no one would recognize him as a soldier unless they drew conclusions from the legs of his olive drab trousers—which did not seem likely.

HE left the building in such a hurry that he had no time in which to pen a note to Secretary Forrest.

The Soodakova woman took a nickel-in-the-slot taxi which was parked directly in front of the departmental building; and Pease, who had been hiding behind one of the pillars at the top of the steps as she descended to the street, now dashed down after her, took a second taxi, and followed her.

The leading taxi headed straight out Connecticut Avenue and across the

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viaduct. Pease followed, feeding a constant stream of nickels into his taximeter.

At last he ran out of change, yet his quarry showed no sign of halting. His own taxi slowed down and came to a stop at the north end of the viaduct. Pease jumped out, just in time to see the other vehicle turn the first corner to the right.

Breathlessly, he dashed after it on foot, and rounding the corner himself. The woman's taxi was turning north into a street which ran along the cliff top overhanging Rock Creek; and by the time Pease reached the opening of this street, the taxi he was pursuing had come to a stop.

Under cover of the street corner, Pease waited for several minutes, but no one got out of the taxi. And at last he concluded that the woman had already left the vehicle before he had arrived at the corner.

There would be nothing suspicious about a man who approached a parked taxi, no matter where it was. For it was customary for taxis to be parked wherever abandoned, and to be picked up by the next person who desired to patronize it and who had the necessary small change. Pease walked boldly but casually forward, with the intention of getting into the parked machine, and of surveying the locality from that point of concealment.

But, when he reached the machine, he noticed that the door of a nearby garage, which abutted the sidewalk, was slightly ajar, and that there was a faint light burning inside.

The temptation proved too much for him. Tiptoeing forward, he cautiously stuck his head around the corner of the garage door.

And at just that moment a blackjack descended on the base of his skull. He did not even know what hit him.

CHAPTER XV.

INTRIGUE IN THE U. S. RANKS.

THE last thing that John Pease knew was that he was peeking into the half-open door of a garage, fronting on a street in the northern part of the city of Washington.

Some time later he came gradually to his senses, to find himself lying on the floor, bound and gagged, with a throbbing pain in the back of his head. The room was dimly lit, and there was the rumble of subdued conversation in one corner.

At first he lay and vaguely wondered where he was. Then the mention of his own name suddenly aroused him to complete consciousness; but he lay still and gave no sign of his recovery.

The man who had mentioned John Pease's name was speaking English with a pronounced Oriental accent.

"Great danger overhangs us, honorable lady," he was saying. "Other detective will follow this one. We execute this one and throw in creek."

"No, no, no!" spoke the unmistakable voice of Mlle. Soodakova. "We mus' keep heem for Kachurin. He eez not detective. He eez assistant to Secretary off Defense."

At the mention of Kachurin, Pease pricked up his ears. Colonel Kachurin was supposedly dead. Could this mention of "Kachurin" mean, therefore, that Colonel Kachurin's father, the Kommissar of all the Siberias, was already in this country, perhaps even in the nation's capital?

An excited voice at the door blurted out a string of Russian syllables, which

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the Soodakova woman promptly translated to her Japanese confederate as follows: "Ze police. Zey come."

"Better bump him off quick, before he squeals on us," spoke a hard American voice.

"Bettair no!" retorted Soodakova.

"Then let's beat it—out through the tunnel," said the other. "Come on—scram!"

There was the rush of departing feet, then silence. Pease rolled over, so that he faced the door. There was no one in sight. A scuffle could be heard downstairs.

Then silently, pad-footedly, a small, crouching figure suddenly appeared in the doorway. He had a snarling face with slant eyes, a face like that on the Japanese statue of an ancient Samurai warrior. And in his hand he carried an up-to-date automatic.

"*Kataka Nippon!*" he hissed, as he slowly raised the gun, and pointed it at the trussed-up man on the floor.

Pease gave an agonized wrench at his bonds, and then closed his eyes. An echoing shot rang out in the confined space of the room. Pease winced, but he was conscious of no pain, of no impact of a bullet. With eyes still closed, he waited for a second shot. But none came.

Instead, he heard a cheery Irish voice sing out, "Wake up, old-timer! It's all over but the shouting."

Incredulously, Pease blinked his eyes open, to see standing before him, automatic in hand, the red-haired, freckle-faced, blue-eyed, grinning A. B. C. newscast reporter, Preston Ross.

ON the floor at Ross's feet lay the body of the murderous Jap.

Ross stooped down and disengaged the gun from the clawed fingers of the dead man.

"May be only shamming, you know," he explained. "It doesn't pay to take chances." Then he undid the gag from Pease's mouth.

As Ross worked at undoing the cords which bound the captive's wrists and ankles, the latter asked, "How, by the grace of good luck, do you happen to be in Washington, and how did you happen to get here in the nick of time?"

Two policemen dashed into the room, and breathlessly asked, "What's up?"

Ross explained, and then replied to Pease, "I reached the Army-Navy-Air Building just after you left it. Your office said that you were in the restaurant. There I ran across Secretary Forrest, looking for you. He said that you had shown suspicion of one of the waitresses. We made guarded inquiries, found out her alleged name, and that she had just gone off duty. Another waitress remembered seeing you leave at the same time she had. You took a civilian hat and coat from the rack, and just as we discovered that, the owner of those articles put up a rumpus. From all of which I deduced that you had followed the girl. '*Cherchez la femme,*' says I."

"But how did you know where to follow?" asked Pease, getting up off the floor, and stretching his cramped arms and legs.

"Quick work by the Intelligence Section," Ross replied. "Strange to say, the girl had given the employment office a correct address, doubtless thinking that this would forestall suspicion, if she was investigated.

"The door man had seen—and reported—a civilian skulking behind the entrance pillars of the department building, and that he had then rushed out and rented a five-and-ten taxi. This, I guessed, was you. Your description was broadcast to the squad cars, and

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the result was the immediate report, by police radio, of a man answering your description. You had been seen hurriedly leaving a taxi at the north end of the Connecticut Avenue viaduct. This location tallied so closely with the address which the suspected waitress had given that we rushed here. We had some difficulty in forcing our way in, but all the inmates except this dead Jap, miraculously disappeared, vanished completely."

"They went through some sort of tunnel," said Pease. "I heard them say so."

The police, on hearing about the tunnel, departed on the run.

"But how did you happen to be in Washington? You haven't yet explained that."

"I came to tell you all about Miss Stevens," Ross replied.

"But I knew about her already," said Pease sadly, his face falling at the recollection of June's mysterious disappearance.

"How could you know?" objected the reporter. "She told no one except me. In fact she sent me to Washington for the express purpose of letting you know."

"Then she's been found?" exclaimed Pease gladly.

"Heaven's sakes! I hope not!" asserted the reporter with anxiety.

"LOOK here," said Pease, running his slim fingers through his wavy black hair in perplexity. "Stop talking in circles, and tell me what this is all about."

"Calm down. Calm down," said Ross. "I've been trying to answer you, but you keep interrupting. Miss Stevens has merely slipped out of sight, so as to avoid being kidnapped by Soviet spies. I got word of the plot through underworld sources. Our New York gangsters may be 'agin the law,' but they're for America; at least most of them are. So they tipped me off."

"There was an American gangster here in this very room, in league with the enemy!" interjected Pease, excitedly.

"Don't interrupt!—As I said, most of them are loyal, like the Paris Apaches during the World War. So I brought a bunch of them to the hospital, pretending that they were radio assistants of mine. Miss Stevens changed into some male clothes which we smuggled in. Then she came out with us, without being suspected. One of our news planes took her to Ottawa, and I set out at once for Washington to tell you. I received a code message at the Washington airport, telling me of her safe arrival."

Pease heaved a deep sigh of relief, then asked, "Why did the enemy want to kidnap her? Were you able to learn that?"

"It was rumored that Kachurin wanted to hold her as hostage in order to keep her father, the premier, from letting Canada get involved in this war on our side."

"But Kachurin is dead."

"Then it must have been two other fellows."

Pease laughed.

"I've got to get back to the department," said he. "There is an important conference on."

The adventure was over. Business was ahead.

On his return to the Army-Navy-Air Building, Pease found that the conference which he had suggested, between Major Hammond, the television experts and the manufacturers of airplanes and radios, was already in progress. But, to allay suspicion, each group

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had ostensibly been called to a separate meeting, then they had secretly convened in Secretary Forrest's private office.

Plans were hastily, but thoroughly made, and at last the meeting broke up.

THE next few weeks were busy ones for Pease, superintending the working out of his new scheme. Miss Stevens was still officially reported as missing, which fact must have puzzled the secret service of the Soviets, though it did not disturb Pease, who possessed inside information as to her safety. However, he did wish that he might communicate with her in some way.

The enemy occupied the entire coastal strip, from Portland to San Diego; but America had fortified all the passes of the Sierras, and held the enemy back from further conquests. Anti-aircraft guns even kept the Japs and the Soviets from flying over the mountains.

In the meantime, our regular army, the national guard, and the reserves were mobilized—mostly without arms, there being none to spring to—in Idaho, Nevada and Arizona. Heavy forces of Canadians gathered along the northern border of Oregon, to preserve neutrality.

Nevertheless, the Japs and the Soviets were not backward in technical developments. Some of their planes had evidently survived the battle of the South Pacific and brought the details of that battle, or perhaps the information had been wirelessed home before the last of their ships sank. Still more likely, Tokyo had picked it up from Gib Floyd's newscast of the battle. At any rate, the enemy had profited by the example of America's delayed explosion water-borne torpedoes, which exploded twice, the first time to destroy the shafts projecting in front of the torpedo catchers, and the second after the projectiles had passed into the ships themselves.

Meanwhile, Russian Soviet battleships raided the entire Atlantic coast and kept American shipping in port, but made not a single attempt to land troops.

The American public was disheartened by these developments, and the Communist Party began to rear its ugly head again, this time as the apostles of peace at any price. But President Benson and Secretary Forrest calmly pursued their plan of action, and refused to be deterred, or even disturbed, by popular clamor.

JOHN PEASE, after several weeks of flitting from factory to factory all over America, with intermittent stops at his Washington office, was finally transferred to one of the mountain passes near Sacramento. And with him went his red-headed friend Preston Ross, who had been persuaded to resign his position with the A. B. C. newscasting chain, and to accept a commission in the U. S. Intelligence Service. The latter fact was not being advertised, however, and he was disguised as an ordnance officer.

All commercial aircraft that could be spared had been taken from the air lanes and gathered at points unknown. Many were disassembled and shipped by train or bus. As a result, the railroads began to enjoy a prosperity unexampled in fifty years. Every commercial air pilot who could be spared, was drafted into the army, and sent to training camp.

Fortunately, it was an unusually mild winter, like that back in 1931-32; but almost any day a blizzard in the

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Sierras might put an end to the hopes of American victory.

Preston Ross had not yet been let in on John Pease's secret. The two friends traveled by train to the great military mobilization camp at Reno. Then, after being thoroughly identified and checked, and spending a night there, they went on by special military train to Gold Run, on the American River. There again, they were carefully checked.

Gold Run was the center of a huge air corps encampment, guarded from spying enemy eyes by anti-aircraft artillery on all the peaks for miles around.

As Pease and Ross left the administration building and were being led to the quarters which had been assigned to them, they noticed a plane, not far above the ground, going through such loops, and tailspins, and falling leaves, that even the most experienced airman would have blanched at the mere thought of them.

"Look at those stunts!" exclaimed Ross admiringly. "That must be some noted dare-devil!"

"On the contrary," replied the officer who was accompanying them, "it happens to be merely a student flier who never handled a plane until day before yesterday."

"Then the poor fellow has lost control of his ship!" shouted Ross. "Why on earth don't you get more excited about it?"

"On the contrary, he has it under perfect control."

Just then the plane, which had almost reached the ground in its antics, straightened out, and soared off over the tree tops.

"All I can say," Ross asserted, "is that you must have a wonderful system of instruction at this camp."

"We have," the officer replied enigmatically.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RADIO EYE.

JOHN PEASE unpacked his few military belongings in the bare board cubicle which had been assigned to him in the officers' barracks at Gold Run. As he was hanging up his shaving mirror, with his back turned toward the window, he saw in the mirror the reflection of a Salvation Army lassie, approaching along the walk just outside.

With great presence of mind he kept his back still turned toward the window, but he studied intently the image in the mirror. At first his attention had been attracted merely by the swaying grace of the girl's figure; but as she approached and passed the window, he made out clearly what he had suspected from the first instant, namely that the face beneath the blue straw bonnet, with its red band of ribbon, was none other than the face of Anna Soodakova.

As soon as she had passed, Pease hurried over to the cubicle of Preston Ross and told his friend of the discovery.

"You must put in at once for a transfer to some other dormitory," said Pease, "and from now on, you don't know me from Adam. We've never met before. And we mustn't be seen talking together. Lord knows how many confederates that woman has in this camp."

Then he described the Russian woman in as much detail as possible to his friend, and returned to his own bunk.

For the next two or three days, the

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two young men saw but little of each other, and passed each other without recognition. But finally they met by accident in a corridor of one of the shops. At the moment no one else was in sight.

Ross hurriedly whispered, "That woman is very chummy with an infantry private named Jarvis.—I've got to keep a good hold on myself on this case, for she fascinates me."

Pease gave a start at the name "Jarvis," and hastily told Ross of having seen an American soldier named Jarvis at the Martha's Vineyard camp of the Siberians, just after the capture of that camp and the discovery of the dead body of Colonel Kachurin. Ross made his friend go into great detail as to the entire episode; and then, at the sound of approaching footsteps they separated, Ross saying in parting, "I shall radio immediately for a report on Private Jarvis."

Two days later, as they passed each other in one of the buildings, Ross slipped his friend a note, reading, "Jarvis okay. In service long before this war, and well thought of. But—the finger prints of the dead body of Colonel Kachurin match exactly the War Department's record prints of Private Jarvis. Destroy this note."

Pease saw to it that there was no trace of the ashes after he had burned the note.

So that was what had become of the elusive Siberian colonel! He had swapped identities with a dead American soldier!

Orders were at once issued, ostensibly transferring "Private Jarvis" to another post, the idea being to seize him quietly *en route,* and thus get him safely into prison, without letting any of his supporters know just what had become of him.

But far-flung and intricate were the ramifications of the Soviet secret service. Both Kachurin and his mistress promptly disappeared on the eve of the transfer.

And though all the camp and the surrounding mountains were thoroughly combed, not a trace could be found of either of them.

"Too much hullabaloo and confusion," Preston Ross confided to his friend. "If the authorities had left the job to the secret service, we might have caught the two spies. But with all this publicity, and with the entire military police turned loose on the case, it was hopeless. Now that the excitement is over, I shall continue to work quietly, for I am convinced that it was an inside job, and that Kachurin and the Soodakova woman are still in this camp."

AT last the day arrived for the big drive to recapture California. Fortunately, the weather was still warm.

America now had an almost unlimited supply of aircraft. But as for pilots with which to fly them, it was probable that the combined air corps of Japan, Russia and Siberia outnumbered that of the United States at least five to one.

But America possessed one technical development of which the enemy never dreamed—unless Kachurin and Soodakova and their confederates had succeeded in passing out the information. Even if they had, the development was one with which the enemy had not the means nor the time to cope.

That development was this: the American aviators were to remain on the ground—or, rather, *under* the ground—where they would be perfectly safe! For the great scheme which

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John Pease had conceived, and which had been put into effect by the combined brains of Colonel Hammond (he had been promoted because of it) and the best radio, television and aircraft engineers of the country, was the radio eye. All of the American planes were to fly unmanned, controlled by radio by pilots located in underground bomb-proof dugouts, and enabled to observe the enemy by means of television apparatus located on their respective planes.

This television apparatus was so arranged that it would point in whatever direction the head of the pilot desired. When he looked down, the "eye" in the plane also looked down, so that the pilot could see just what was beneath his plane.

When he looked to the right, the eye in the plane looked to the right, and the pilot saw what was to the right of his plane. And so on. Yet all the time the pilot himself was seated safely in his dugout, many miles away from the fighting, with the visual receiving instrument strapped before his eyes.

There was one other improvement, too. If the pilot became dizzy or confused by the apparent whirling of space about him, as he put his plane into a side-slip or a spin in order to avoid or to attack some enemy flier, all he need do was push a button on the joy-stick which operated the remote control of the plane. A gyroscope would at once stabilize the eye and hold it steady, undisturbed by the antics of the plane.

Most of the American airships were armed with 50-caliber machine guns of the latest type, but some had been hastily equipped with the recoil-less Pastoriza big cannon.

Such was the equipment with which the United States aviators of the year 2000 went forth—or rather, stayed home—to recapture San Francisco.

EARLY in the morning on the day set for the attack, John Pease took his position with the other members of the staff of the commanding general in the headquarters dugout at Gold Run. Secretary Forrest was there, having arrived the night before to witness and take charge of the battle.

As he greeted the general and John Pease, he remarked to the latter, "I saw a friend of yours last night."

"Who? Preston Ross?"

"No. Miss June Stevens."

"What!" exclaimed Pease. "Is she still here?"

The venerable professor nodded.

Pease continued in an aggrieved tone, "Why didn't you tell me? What was she doing here?"

Forrest replied, "I didn't tell you, for at the time it was a military secret. But there's no harm in letting you know now. Her father, the Canadian premier, has at last obtained the consent of the government of Great Britain, and Canada may now declare war independently. To-day his country will declare war on our enemies. Miss Stevens is here as the secret messenger of her father, to see that everything is properly coördinated between our two countries."

"Where is she?" asked Pease, eagerly.

"Up at the Red Cross shack. I suppose that you'll make a bee-line for there as soon as the battle is over."

Just then the general announced, "The headquarters plane is going up."

He sat in a wicker easy chair, facing a large silvered screen. Beside him, with feet and hands on the necessary controls, which were just like those of

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a plane, sat his pilot, his television headset on his head. In front of the general was a table bearing a large map, a microphone, a loud speaker, and various switches.

He threw a switch, and there appeared on the screen the camp of Gold Run, nestling in the cañon of the American River. Smaller and smaller it grew, and then slid out from under, as the plane sped westward.

The general began issuing orders into his microphone. "Notify all other headquarters that we are in the air. First air army, take off. Other armies follow in order."

The Sacramento Valley appeared on the screen. The direction of the drift of the panorama then changed as the plane turned toward San Francisco. At last Berkeley and Oakland and the bay came into view. Everywhere below, enemy planes could be seen rising to the attack—hundreds of them!

"I should think," some one remarked, "that we are flying too low for safety. It would take only an instant for one of those enemy ships to get above us."

"We're really miles in air," Pease explained. "The eye of our ship has a telephoto lens, which makes distances seem much less than they really are. You see those blurs which occasionally flash across the screen? Those are the ships of the general's bodyguard, at least a mile beneath us."

Above the bay, the general's plane halted. American planes now appeared in V after V from the northwest, and began mixing it up with the enemy.

BUT it soon became noticeable that many of the American ships were stalling in the air, were getting out of control, then to flounder to the ground.

"Can it be that the enemy are able to send out some sort of neutralizing wave, and thus interfere with your control waves, Captain Pease?" asked an air corps officer of the old school, a bit maliciously.

"No. I rather think not," Pease thoughtfully replied. "You see, each of our control waves, of radio frequency, has superimposed upon it an audio-frequency wave. This audio-frequency wave consists of a certain definite, rapid succession of musical pitches. It's an improvement of the old Hammond idea."

"*Our* Colonel Hammond?"

"No. His grandfather. Well, as I was saying, a band-pass rejector system, and a synchronized sound trap on the plane filter out each control wave. The enemy could never pick exactly the right wave length and exactly the right successive combination of sounds. Even if they succeeded in picking out the exact wave length and a number of the correct sounds, we would still keep control for the larger part of each second. Thus, we could offset any attempt at interference."

"That's all very pretty," sneered the air corps officer, "but our planes do seem to be getting out of control, in spite of your fine invention."

"Oh, tell him!" boomed out the jovial voice of Secretary Forrest. "Don't let him suffer."

The general swung around in his swivel chair, and exclaimed, "Gentlemen—gentlemen! Our secret service informed us several days ago that the enemy have resurrected the old ignition-stopping ray of the French. Merely to test out that information, we composed our first contingents in to-day's battle entirely of old-fashioned gasoline-motored planes.—But the next contingents are Diesel-motored. Our

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reserves are oil-burning steam. The Diesels are just now getting into action. There will be no more of our planes out of control."

It was true. The American air fleet suddenly steadied, and began to get the upper hand in the combat.

"Want to see some close-up fighting, sir?" asked one of the orderlies, handing Pease a television headset.

Pease put it on, and adjusted the lenses. He was now sharing the vision of the pilot of one of the combat planes. He experienced all the sensations of being in that plane himself, and seemed to be diving straight at an enemy fighter. The two ships apparently roared on to a collision; but just as the enemy loomed large before him, Pease's plane side-slipped and passed under the other. Pease glanced up, and saw the enemy pilot crumple in his seat. Then Pease glanced back, and saw that the enemy plane, out of control, was bursting into flames.

BUT he also saw another plane, with machine gun wide open, diving straight for his tail. Pease closed his eyes, let out a shriek, and ducked.

Then, remembering where he was, he tore off his headset, which had gone dead, and looked around embarrassedly at the laughing throng.

"What's the matter? Were you shot down?" asked Forrest.

Pease shook the cobwebs out of his brain, ran his fingers through his hair.

"Good Lord, but that seemed real!" he exclaimed. "But the poor American pilot I was with got his."

"Not at all! Not at all!" boomed Forrest. "He merely switched onto a new plane; and probably he's already rising from his camp with the next contingent.—That is; he's theoretically rising, for the pilot himself is still safe in his dugout!"

This apparatus was Pease's own idea, though he had not worked out the technical details which were responsible for its success. And yet he found great difficulty in adjusting his mind to it.

He turned his attention back to the general's screen. Single and group combats were now in progress all over the field of view below, and each side appeared to be losing about an equal number of planes. But the astounding thing was that America was not losing a single *man*—and her supply of planes was practically unlimited.

As the picture on the screen swept back and forth across the aërial field of battle, the observers in the dugout noticed that one American airplane which came up with a contingent of replacements promptly separated from its fellows, skirted the fight, and sped away to the southward.

"Where's that fellow going?" asked the general to one of his aides. "Is this desertion or treachery? Get a report on him for me at once."

Then his scrutiny of the field of combat continued.

Suddenly the pilot at the general's side spoke excitedly, "Swing to the right, sir."

The general did so, and instantly the screen was obscured by a huge blur.

"Focus down!"

The general twirled some dials, and the blur suddenly resolved itself into a Siberian plane approaching head on. The ugly muzzle of a four-inch gun, encased in a Pastoriza recoil-absorber, protruded from the bow of the plane. A blast of white smoke suddenly spread out all around the muzzle, every one ducked, and the screen went blank.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

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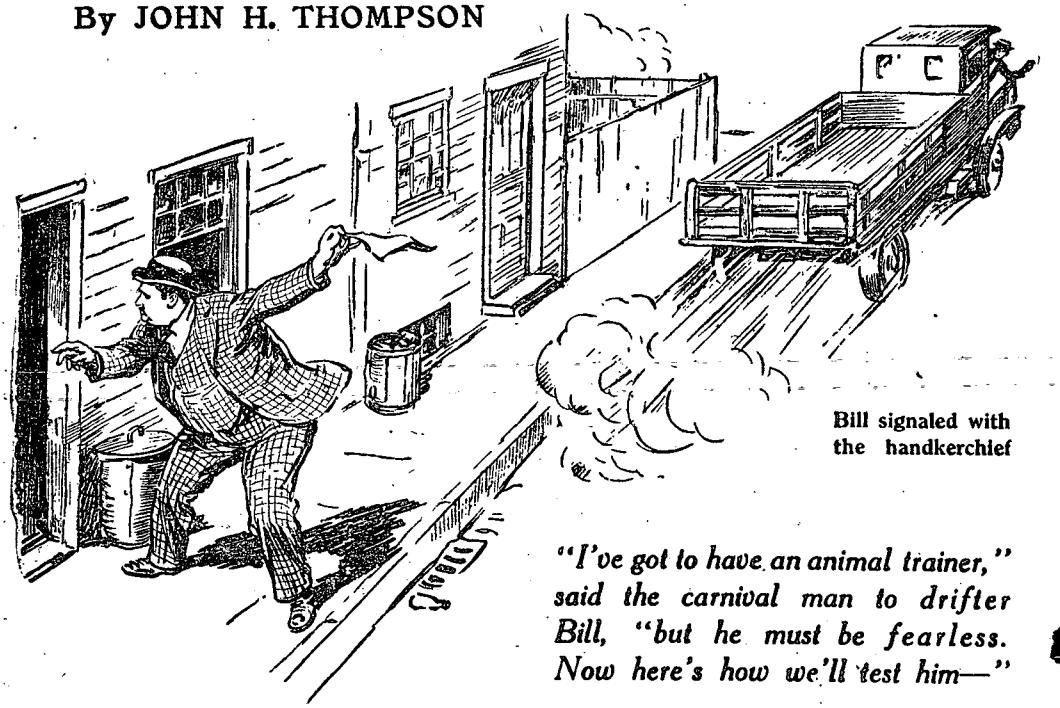
Lion Tamer

By JOHN H. THOMPSON



Bill signaled with the handkerchief

"I've got to have an animal trainer," said the carnival man to drifter Bill, "but he must be fearless. Now here's how we'll test him—"

"D'YOU remember Flem Peabody?" queried Matt Beary as he unbuttoned his vest and ordered a third slab of pie.

Bill and I having consumed double portions of the earlier courses, had already unbuttoned our vests, so that all that was necessary for us now was to nonchalantly indicate to the waiter that Matt's wasn't the only pie plate on which the floral design was visible. So long as Matt was footing the bill, we were agreeable to juggling pie indefinitely. It wasn't every day that we stumbled across our old-time pal, the proprietor of Beary's world-famous carnival shows.

"Sure, we remember Flem," chuckled Bill reminiscently.

"Well, Flem is either a bigger liar than he used to be, or else he'd make a danged good animal man for my show," said Matt.

"He used to be quite a liar," ventured Bill judicially. "In fact, the only time I remember him telling the truth was when he bragged of having served a term in jail for perjury."

"Well, he claims he's turned over a new leaf—in fact, a whole book of leaves," said Beary. "I happened to run across him to-day. He's been to Africa—went as a sailor. He proved that O. K., because he had the papers. He said he'd been hunting wild game in Africa. The only proof he had of that, though, was a slash across his face that he claimed he got when he tackled a man-eating lion bare-handed."

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"More likely it was the mark of a bullet fired at him while he was bootlegging or something like that," suggested Bill.

"Well, I've simply got to get a good animal man somewhere," said Beary. "That's where you boys come in."

"Nothing doing," interposed Bill hastily. "We don't want to be no animal men. We don't like strange dogs, even when they're wagging their tails—let alone man-eating tigers and other amphibians that eat raw meat and spend their idle moments sharpening their teeth on the steel bars of cages. That's not our line. Eh, Jim?"

I nodded emphatic approval.

"Lions ain't amphibians," corrected Matt mildly.

"That makes no difference," insisted Bill. "Call 'em what you like, but we—"

"Well, never mind that," interrupted Matt. "I don't want you boys for the job. What I want to do, my friends, is to find out whether or not Flem is lying."

"Offhand, my guess is that he is lying," said Bill.

"But I can't afford to take any chances," said Matt. "I've got to dig up an animal man, and Flem is the only prospect in sight; but if he's only bluffing I want to find it out before I tie up with him.

"He refuses to come with the shows without a six-month contract. A crooked parasite is one kind of an animal that I don't want sewed up with my menagerie—not with the show business the way it is now."

"Where do we come in?" queried Bill.

"Well," explained Matt, "I've been mulling over a little plan in my mind, and I want to pull it off without dragging in any of the men from over at the lot, because if it happens that Flem is telling the truth it wouldn't be right to expose him to a lot of guying after I took him on."

The waiter was edging over to our table with the check. Matt looked at us inquiringly.

"Sure, you can count on us to help you out—no question about it," we chorused hurriedly.

"Fine." Matt dug down into his pocket and paid the bill.

"Flem's got a room over on Hill Street." Matt fumbled in his pocket and produced a soiled piece of paper with an address written on it. "Twenty-five Hill Street." "It must be some landlady who can't read human character or whose faith in mankind never has been shattered—either that or Flem arrived with a couple of suitcases stuffed with bricks.

"Flem said I'd find him there any afternoon after two o'clock. It's two-thirty now. I've got one of the light trucks out in front. I'll drop one of you boys at the end of the block and then go to the other end and turn around while you walk to number twenty-five and ring the bell. As soon as the door is opened, announce that you are a police officer and holler for Flem Peabody.

"I'll be coming along in the truck with the ignition shut off, and when you give the signal—drop a handkerchief or something—I'll turn on the ignition and the engine will back-fire. It 'll sound like pistol shots. You holler that there's a couple of escaped lions out in front and that you want Flem to help catch 'em.

"A police officer, pistol shots, escaped lions—if that isn't a dyed in the wool, blown in the glass, sterling marked, fourteen carat, triple action, automatic test for a one-time crook and

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suspected liar, I'll let you pin a liar's medal on my own chest."

IT sounded O. K. to me, as soon as Bill volunteered to be the bird to ring the bell and proclaim the clarion call for the big game hunter. If by chance Flem should pass the test, I preferred no to be too close to him when he started expressing his opinion after he discovered that the whole thing was a false alarm to put him on the grid. As I recalled it, in the days before his alleged reformation, Flem's vocabulary was such that he wouldn't have to take his hat off to any of his fellow sailors on his trip to Africa.

We dropped Bill at the foot of Hill Street, drove to the other end, turned around and started back again as Bill approached the door of number twenty-five. Just as we went past the house, Bill, standing in the doorway, dropped a handkerchief. Matt snapped on the ignition. Twice the engine back-fired with two loud reports which could have been heard a mile away.

"Look back! Is Flem out in front?" shouted Matt, his attention directed to the road ahead.

"Holy mackerel!" I shouted when we had gone far enough that I could see the rear of the house.

"What happened? What happened?" demanded Matt impatiently.

"Nothing much," I chuckled, "except some guy just jumped out of a second-story window at the rear of the house. He went through a window shade and everything. It's hanging around his neck. There he goes over a back fence. He made it with one jump. He's gone. I can't see him now. It was Flem, all right."

The truck had reached the foot of the street and swung around the corner. Matt drew up to the curbing and stopped.

"So that's the guy that tackled a lion bare-handed in the jungles of Africa!" snorted Matt in disgust. "That's the guy that wanted to be my animal trainer—rushing across country with a window shade around his neck, just because somebody shouted that a couple of decrepit lions were playing in the street. The crazy, four-flushing liar!" He continued growling and sputtering as we sat there waiting for Bill. It seemed to be an interminably long wait.

"Here, we might as well be enjoying a smoke while we're waiting," said Matt finally, handing over a cigar and snipping off the end of another for himself. "I can afford to blow you boys to some smokes. This test is going to save me all the mazuma that would have been tied up in a six-month contract, and it isn't going to cost me a cent."

"Don't be too sure of that, Matt, old man." The speaker was Bill. He had arrived while we were busy lighting the cigars.

"Oh, hello, Bill," chuckled Matt. "Where's the big game hunter?"

"He jumped through a back window," said Bill. "And incidentally the landlady expects you to pay for the window, the shade and the draperies—Flem took the whole works with him."

"It's nothing," said Matt reassuringly. "I'll pay. It's worth it."

"But that's not the half of it," continued Bill.

THEN I noticed with sudden uneasiness that a bulky stranger was at his elbow.

"I was going to take this bird to the bughouse," said the stranger, indi-

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cating Bill, "but I guess he's been telling me the truth."

Matt seemed relieved. "Well, we certainly found out that one lying four-flusher wasn't a fearless big game hunter, didn't we, Bill?" he ventured.

"I guess so," agreed Bill a bit uncertainly, "but the trouble is I didn't have a chance to mention any lions. I only got as far as the announcement that I was a police officer and wanted Flem Peabody. Then I gave the signal and the truck back-fired. There was a crash of glass. Flem had gone through a window without stopping to hear any more. That baby sure must have had an uneasy conscience; and the joke of it is that all the time he was rooming in the same house with a real police officer and never knew it."

"I'm not going to press a charge of breach of the peace against your friend here," interposed the bulky looking stranger generously. "Only the charge of impersonating an officer. The fine won't be more than fifty dollars."

"The officer right there in the house all the time and Flem never knew it," chuckled Bill. "Wasn't that a joke?"

"Yeah, it was a good joke," agreed Matt without enthusiasm, "but it ought to be good, seeing as it's going to cost me fifty dollars." And he was still muttering under his breath as Bill and his escort clambered aboard and we started for the police station.

THE END.

Why Bedouins Never Harm Foxes

LACK of water and vegetation makes the list of fauna of the Saharan wastes a very short one. The most numerous animal is the goat, which can go without water for even a longer time than camels, lizards, sand ants or the little red desert foxes with great tufts of tails, pert, shapely heads and great pointed ears.

These little Saharan foxes often come very close to the bivouacs of the Bedouins, and are not in the least alarmed when the famished nomads walk toward them. Their nonchalance is due to a sense of security fostered by several centuries; for a Bedouin would rather die of hunger than capture and eat a desert fox. The little animals are regarded as living omens of good luck, and are almost sacred.

The world of Islam feels in a way indebted to them, because tradition says that once Abu Bekr, Mohammed's uncle, and the successor and sword bearer of Islam, went disguised as a Jewish merchant to spy on the Byzantines who held Northern Africa before the Arabs invaded it. Recognized by the leader of a patrolling troop of Byzantine horsemen, Abu Bekr was captured, tied hand and foot, and left to die on the open desert.

But when he was on the verge of collapsing from hunger, thirst, and the burning beams of the sun, a little desert fox came to him, gnawed off his fetters, then brought him a lizard, which the grace of Allah rendered palatable. Freed and invigorated by that unenviable meal, Abu Bekr arose and managed to trudge back to his followers, to whom he announced that from that time on his blessing protected all desert foxes. And even to-day his wish is law to all Orthodox Moslems.

Armand Brigaud.

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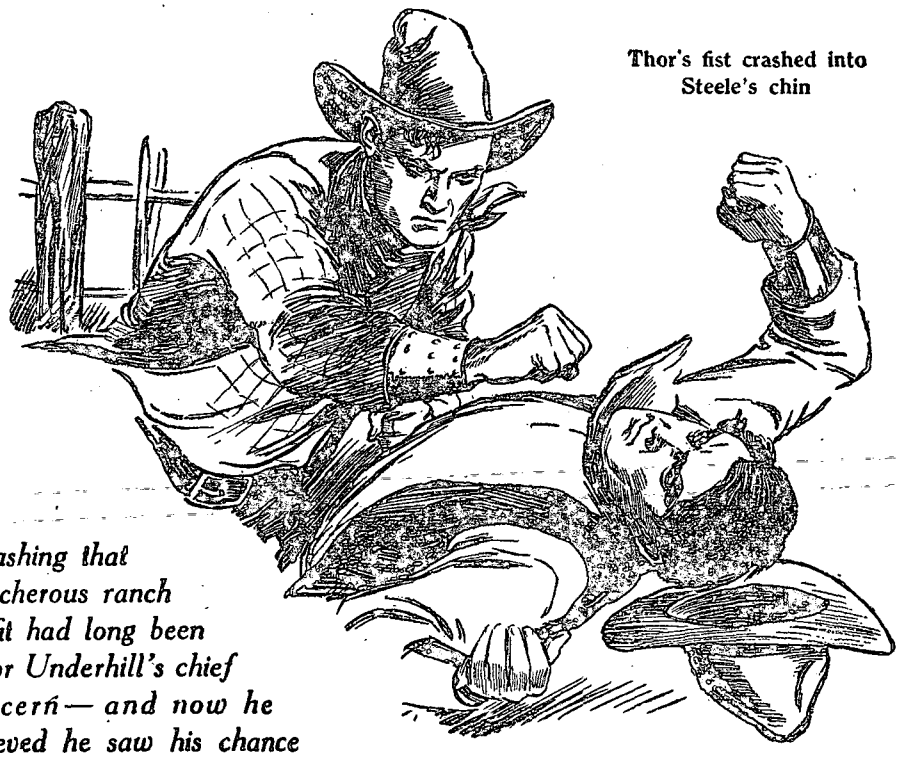

Thor's fist crashed into Steele's chin

Smashing that treacherous ranch outfit had long been Thor Underhill's chief concern—and now he believed he saw his chance

Breath of the Desert*

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER
Author of "Gone North," "Double Cross Ranch," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

THOR UNDERHILL, the giant son of old Jason Underhill who owned the Flying U ranch, brought the old feud between the Flying U and the Hat ranches out into the open again. Thor hung two of the Hat men who had been caught with stolen horses, and when that happened, the Sladens, who owned the Hat outfit, swore revenge. Before they had a chance to revenge themselves, however, Thor Underhill shot Bill Sladen, whom he had encountered as he was attacking a girl named Lyndia Kolsar, daughter, as every one thought, of a Polish neighbor. Bill Sladen was instantly killed, but when Thor examined his body, it was to discover that not one bullet, but two, had been responsible for the man's death. Thor knew, however, that he had fired only one shot. Who had fired the other?

Blackie Sladen, Bill's brother, and Steele Sladen, Bill's son, were infuriated. They suspected Thor Underhill, but had no proof. Steele was afraid to

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tackle Thor himself, and so he hired a famous gun fighter known as Montana Ed, to do the job. But Montana was so deliberate about it that Steele impatiently hired several other killers to get Thor Underhill for him, and swore he'd kill Montana into the bargain. Montana manifested a certain strange friendliness for Thor Underhill, and fell in love with a girl named Nance Kayne, from Wyoming, who was visiting her uncle, a man named Carson, who owned the J Bar C ranch nearby, though Nance, knowing Montana's reputation, refuses to have anything to do with him.

The Sladens grew worse and worse, giving promise that they will stop at nothing. They are responsible for the deaths of several loyal men. They steal the Flying U horse herd and run off with it toward the border. And at the same time they kidnap both Lyndia Kolsar and Nance Kayne, with whom they hide out in the open country. They are discovered, however, by Lyndia's younger brother, Jake Kolsar. The whole country is now aroused and bent on exterminating the troublesome Sladen outfit.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MORE OF THE PAST.

JASON UNDERHILL had found Thor and had told him that Lyndia and Nance were missing and that the Sladens were suspected of stealing the two girls.

Far to the southward, over miles of virgin wilderness, across desert stretches, in a mountainous region, circling east and west, Thor and his Flying U riders had searched.

Dejected, but reluctant to quit, they were making a last effort. They came down from the upland country into the valley of the Kolsar range. Cold, grim, with hollow, dust-rimmed eyes, Thor Underhill led his riders to the Kolsar ranch house.

In answer to Thor's loud banging upon a door, Peter Kolsar opened it a little.

Thor pushed the door open, almost knocking Kolsar down, and shoved his way into a big room. There he stood staring down at Mrs. Kolsar.

"Mrs. Kolsar, your husband is a liar," said Thor. "We can't believe anything he says. Have you seen Steele or Blackie Sladen?"

"No," declared the woman. "I no see the Sladens for two-three week, maybe more."

"Have you seen Lyndia?"

"No.—I no see Lyndia since her fadder sell her to Beel Sladen."

"Have you seen Nance Kayne—Jesse Carson's niece?"

"No. I no know her. She no been here, anyway. No woman been here. No Sladens—nobody. I tell the truth, Meester Thor. What happen you come in here like thees?"

"The Sladens have got Lyndia and Nance Kayne," said Thor.

THE woman suddenly began to sob. She held both hands over her face.

Suddenly she snatched her hands from her eyes. Her tear-stained eyes were blazing.

"Such trouble!" she screamed. "Such trouble. For twenty year I fight mine hosband. He hate Lyndia. Always he beat her. Then he sell her to Beel Sladen. Always he say he going to tell the Sladens.—Now I tell! Lyndia is not mine hosband's child! She is not my child! Twenty year ago, after the wagon burn in the desert near the

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Wishbone Valley, my hosband and me ride to the wagon to see what happen.

"The wagon is burn up. The horses are dead. I don't know who was in the wagon; but I go everywhere and look around, and I find li'l baby—li'l girl baby, all roll' up in a blanket in mesquite clump. Maybe the mother in the wagon see what coming and hide the baby. I don' know. The baby need a mother, so I take it; and me and my hosband bring it home. The baby I name Lyndia.—Now, you beeg no-good!" she yelled at Kolsar. "Now it is tol'!"

Lyndia, then, was not a Kolsar! She was not a foreigner; she was the lost daughter of the unfortunate woman, the woman who had come here in the wagon which had been destroyed by fire. She had been reared as a Kolsar, had been trained to the Kolsar speech, with its queer idioms. Even the Kolsar characteristics had become hers through emulation. And yet now, thinking of the girl, Underhill could see that she was different. Even her speech had been improved during the months she had been away from home.

"Do the Sladens know this about Lyndia?" Thor asked.

"No," answered Mrs. Kolsar. "Nobody know it. Only my hosband. Everybody can know it now. There is no need to keep it from anybody."

Thor turned and went out of the house, his riders following.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

OUT OF THE DAWN.

DOWN in a valley to the east of the Kolsar ranch house, and in a grove close to the banks of a small stream, the Flying U riders dismounted. Horses and men were tired. In the light of the early dawn they built a fire and stretched out around it, silent and dejected. In spite of all their knowledge of the country, they had not found a trace of the horses or of the girls. The Sladens had covered their tracks well. They had left no sign. Both Thor and his riders knew that they had been outwitted.

One of the men made coffee and fried some bacon from the slim store that now remained. There was some soda biscuit.

Thor drank some coffee, but did not eat anything. He sat staring into the fire.

Now he raised his head to listen. He heard the faint beating of hoofs at a distance. Then, far up on the western slope of the valley, the rider appeared. Thor recognized him as young Jake Kolsar, Lyndia's "brother." His face was white and his eyes wild with excitement.

Breathlessly he gasped out his story. Four nights ago he had been on the high mesa overlooking Wishbone Valley. He had detected movement in the valley! A herd of horses was running, urged on by cowboys, and was driven straight toward the face of the big cliff that formed part of the rock wall on the south side of the valley. The horses and the men who were driving them vanished into the rock wall, and had raced out into a circular basin.

Young Kolsar had remained on the great mesa all night; and the next day he had seen Blackie and Steele Sladen and another man bring a girl into the basin and put her into a small cabin in a grove of trees. He had never seen the girl before. Still later Steele and one of the men had ridden out of the basin again, returning two or three hours later with another girl. Kolsar recognized her as his sister, Lyndia.

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The two girls were prisoners. Jake knew they were in danger, and that night he made his way down from the high mesa to the river bed. He had found the secret entrance to the basin, but a man was guarding the entrance. He was asleep, and Jake had stolen up and struck him over the head with a rock.

Jake had his Sharps rifle. About two o'clock in the morning he saw a man coming stealthily out of the grove of trees where the other Sladen men were sleeping and move toward the cabin. Obviously the man intended to molest the girls.

AT that instant Jake trained the long Sharps on him and pulled the trigger. The man fell. But Jake's courage now deserted him and he hurriedly escaped from the basin. He climbed back to the high mesa again, and from a line of loose rocks and bowlders that rimmed the edge of the great rock wall he had watched all the following day.

In the first darkness he had seen the men drive the horses out of the basin, and when the moon came up he had seen the Sladens putting the girls on their horses. They had seen him, too. One of them had shot at him. Then the Sladens had taken the girls out of the basin.

Jake was not greatly concerned about the horses, and he was convinced that the Sladens had taken the girls in another direction. It was late in the afternoon when he found their trail. Secreting his horse in a box cañon, he followed the trail on foot. At dusk he saw a camp fire blazing in the shelter of a great rim rock. He managed to climb to the top of the rock ledge, from which, concealed by some brush, he could look down upon the Sladens, the fire and the girls. The Sladens seemed worried and impatient.

"I could have shot both of them," said Jake, his eyes gleaming with hate, "but I was afraid that they might get me, and then no one would ever find Lyndia. So I waited until I thought they were asleep. Then I got down, sneaked back to my horse, and started out to find you. Two or three miles back, riding a high ridge, I'd seen some riders coming down the side of the valley. The riders were you and your men."

He paused at the end of his breathless narrative and looked expectantly at Thor.

"Can you find that timber cache again?"

"Sure." Young Kolsar's voice was shrill with excitement. "You know where it is as well as I do," he said. "It's that rim rock abou[illegible] mile straight down that dry [illegible]at begins at the head of the [illegible]eading down to the Hat ranch."

Thor remembered the place. He turned to the other men, who had crowded around him. "You boys ride straight to the Hat," he ordered. "There's a chance that the Sladens may have taken the girls there, this morning. Fan it!"

He did not wait for the other men to move. Before he had even finished issuing his orders he was running toward Midnight. He threw saddle and bridle on the big horse, jerked the cinches tight and leaped astride. The horse was running before Thor's foot had found the stirrup on the right side. Tired as he was, the great animal cleared the stream of water with one gigantic leap and went scurrying up the opposite slope in a cloud of dust. Not far behind Midnight came the other Flying U men, stringing out over

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the face of the slope. Following them rode Jake Kolsar.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BACK TO THE HAT.

DEEP in the wilderness country lying between the Wishbone Valley and the Hat ranch, Steele and Blackie Sladen were awakened to the dawn by Lyndia's protests. The two men straightened out of their blankets to hear her complaining that they had tied her ankles together too tightly.

"Serves you right, you bullheaded Polack!" snarled Steele.

He got up, rekindled the fire from the dying embers, clamped his hat on his disordered hair, seized a canteen and went into the surrounding timber.

Blackie removed the ropes from the ankles and wrists of the prisoners.

"You'd better tell Steele who killed his father," he said. "If you don't he'll probably knock hell out of you when we get you back to the Hat. It was Thor Underhill, wasn't it?"

"I don't know," declared Lyndia. "I've told you that before, and I tell you again. I don't know. Your brother Beel had hit me and knocked me down. I was unconscious when he was killed."

The previous day the Sladens and the girls had camped in this spot, which was surrounded by a tangle of wild brush and thickly growing trees that formed an impenetrable barrier. The forest rose on all sides of them for many miles, and there were no trails here, except the secret one which was obviously known to the Sladens. That they used the spot often was indicated by the cooking utensils and the food which were cached in the rocks at the base of the rim.

The Sladens prepared breakfast, consisting of bacon which was almost rancid, and a mixture of flour and cornmeal that Blackie fashioned into a repulsive cake in the frying pan, and coffee, strong and black.

The girls drank coffee, but declined the bacon and Blackie's bread substitute. Steele cursed the bacon. Both men were ill natured.

After breakfast he got up and stood close to her, grinning at her.

"So you've fallen for Montana, have you?" he laughed. "Well, Montana's through. He's a traitor. When we get back to the Hat I'm getting my rifle out. When I see Montana ride in, I'm going to let him have it. It's going to be the same way with Thor Underhill. Do you hear that, you pale-faced Polack?" turning to Lyndia. "You're sweet on him, ain't you? Damn little good it's going to do you. Before I get through with you you'll—never been born. Unc

Lyndia did not answ— —e averted her face. Her chin was lifted disdainfully.

The movement inflamed Steele; he grasped her roughly, by both her arms, and turned her so that she faced him. He shook her savagely.

"I'll take some of that damned pride out of you, too," he threatened.

"Thor will keel you for this!" declared the girl.

Steele might have done more than threaten Lyndia, if Blackie had not intervened. He released Lyndia and they began to pack the cooking utensils into the cache.

WHEN they were ready to get the horses, Steele spoke.

"I don't like this deal," he complained. "We were damned fools for sending the boys south with that

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horse herd. We should have ridden south ourselves, taking the girls with us to the border. Sooner or later the whole damned country will be on horses.

"There's another thing, too, Blackie. Sure as hell, some one is going to find what we've got hidden in the 'dobe house. I think you'd better slip down there and tell old Miguel to get rid of him. There's no use keeping him any longer anyway. The damned fool will never talk now. Then to-night we'll head for the border."

This conversation interested the girls. They had long known of the rumor to the effect that a man had been imprisoned in the adobe house for years. It was whispered that the occupant was a Sladen who had been confined there because he was insane.

"Guess you're right," agreed Blackie abruptly.

Blackie went into the timber, to return presently, riding one of the horses.

"You'd better keep to the timber until you hit the ravine," advised Steele.

Blackie rode away, heading eastward through the timber as Steele had suggested.

TWO hours later Blackie was in a ravine north of the Hat buildings. He rode cautiously forward until, halting behind a tangled mass of wild brush, he was able to see the country in the vicinity of the buildings.

They were deserted, of course, for all of the Hat men were with the horse herd. The sun was shining brightly, and apparently everything was just as it had been when Blackie and Steele had ridden away days before, with the whole Hat outfit.

Blackie rode forward a little, only to halt again, uncertainly.

A strange uneasiness affected him. Over him there stole a feeling that something was wrong. To be sure, the buildings were there, obviously as empty as they had been when he and Steele had left them, and there were no horses in the corral. The bunk and mess house doors were open, and the stable door, just as they had left it; and there was no indication anywhere that any other human being was about. Even the door of the adobe house was closed, showing that Miguel, the Mexican, was inside with his prisoner. Yet a dread presentiment gripped Blackie.

For fully half an hour he sat motionless in the saddle, waiting, screened by the wild brush, watching and listening. Then he rode slowly out of the ravine and up to the door of the adobe house.

He knew that he and Steele would have to get out of the country to-night, but he doubted that it would be necessary to leave before nightfall. If young Kolsar had not discovered the secret basin, they might have stayed there for weeks, and until the search died down. Then they could have driven the horses southward and out of the country, leaving no evidence of their guilt. When he went back to the wilderness cache, he would insist that Steele release the girls. That game was too dangerous. Steele had always been a fool about women, anyway. He would insist upon letting them go free while he and Steele fled southward to safety. Perhaps later, by hiring other gun fighters to augment their present force, they could return to continue their depredations.

Blackie dismounted, strode to the door of the adobe house. His first shock came when he observed that the

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door was unlocked. A greater shock came when he opened the door, to find the adobe house empty. He wheeled, crouching, his gun drawn, to face the dead silence and the vacant land outside.

Still he saw no one, heard no sound. He stood staring, bewildered. Then he thought of Montana, and suddenly the explanation of the prisoner's escape came to him.

Sure. That was it—Montana. Montana had got into the adobe house. No doubt he had killed Miguel and had taken the prisoner away. If that had happened—if Montana had taken the prisoner, Rignall, away—by this time the whole country would know the secret of the burned wagon and the tragedy that had overtaken its occupants. The whole story would ultimately reach the ears of the law, and the law would act. Moreover, the revelation of the tragedy would make the hardy riders who were even now searching for the girls suspect Steele and himself. In the end retribution would find the Sladens.

Blackie began to feel a kind of terror. More than ever he was now convinced that he and Steele had made a mistake.

He stood there in the bright sunlight in front of the door of the adobe house, enveloped in the deep silence, desperate and malevolent.

A faint sound came to his ears. He straightened, listened. The sound came again, steadily. The unmistakable *clip-clop* of a horse's hoofs striking the hard ground near by.

His first thought was of Montana, and he moved cautiously to a corner of the adobe house. There, gun in hand, he peered around. He saw, a little distance down the trail to the westward, along the river bed, a horse and rider. The horse was coming up the trail toward the adobe house, and he saw that the rider was the former prisoner, old Jim Rignall.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

RETRIBUTION.

JIM RIGNALL had not been content to stay at the Flying U ranch house after his son had left him there. Thoughts of the gold, buried under the wagon, had bothered him. He had bridled one of the Flying U horses, thrown a pack saddle upon it, and had ridden to the débris of the wagon, where he had uncovered the gold, removed part of it and packed it into the saddle pockets. Then, eager to show his son the recovered portion of the treasure, he had ridden back to the Hat, believing that he would find the boy there, waiting for the return of the Sladens.

He thought, too, of spending some time searching for his wife's grave, and as Blackie Sladen watched him he strayed from the trail several times, sending the horse upon little excursions here and there. But always he came back to the trail again, and always at the end of each little excursion he was closer to the adobe house. He had changed some during the past few days, Blackie observed; though Blackie did not know that it was due to Mrs. Underhill that Rignall had worked something of a transformation in himself. He had shaved, his hair had been cut.

Except for the dead white skin of his face and the hollows under his eyes, both results of his long incarceration, he now looked like a prosperous rancher, convalescing after an illness.

When he reached a point within per-

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haps a hundred feet of the adobe house, he called:

"Ed! Ed! Where are you?"

Blackie's horse was behind the adobe house, and not visible to Rignall.

When he was within perhaps a dozen feet of the adobe house, Rignall halted, climbed stiffly down from the saddle, and stood gazing around him. Aloud he said to himself:

"I thought Ed would be here."

Then he turned and saw Blackie. Blackie stood, gun in hand, glaring at him, his eyes malignant.

"Damn you! How did you get out of here?"

Rignall gasped. He spoke breathlessly, excitedly. "My son got me out of here, Sladen," he said.

"Your son! Who in hell do you mean?"

"My son, who has been searching for me for twenty years," he said.

"Who is your son?" asked Blackie. His voice was vibrant with rage, his eyes glowed with amazement.

"Why, Ed Rignall's my son," Rignall answered. "I heard him tell Mrs. Underhill that he was called Montana."

"*Montana!*" The word seemed to burst from Blackie's throat. "Hell and blazes!" he cursed.

Slowly he raised the muzzle of his six-shooter, his face working with murderous passions, but as he did so, he heard a voice behind him:

"Easy, Blackie!"

BLACKIE turned swiftly, to see Montana standing within a dozen yards of him, at the edge of a thick clump of brush. Montana's six-shooter was in his right hand, tight against his side, just above the hip. In his eyes was the savage fire that had been in them on the day he had killed the Mexican who had guarded his father. To Blackie, who was guilty, he was a terrible apparition.

"I'm Ed Rignall," said Montana.

Blackie stared wildly. The terrible significance of Montana's words seemed to shock him to speech. Here was the son of the man whom the Sladens had pretended to the world was an insane member of their own family.

"You—you a Rignall!" he gasped.

"Yes. Jim Rignall's son."

Montana was now leaning forward a little. There was cold, deadly deliberation in his voice.

"I'm Jim Rignall's son," he repeated. "Do you [illegible] I'm the son of the man you held a captive in chains for twenty years, while you tried to make him tell you where his gold was. Twenty years, you whelp! Do you know what that means, taken out of a man's life? Do you know what it meant to him when his wife died and you wouldn't even let him know where she was buried? Do you know what it meant to him to spend twenty years in your damned prison, while he wondered where his baby girl was? That didn't mean anything to you, did it? All you had in mind was to get his gold. Human suffering and misery were nothing to you. You whelp! You polecat!"

He moved closer. He seemed to be in the grip of a terrible lust to slay, and Sladen shrank back as Montana moved closer inch by inch.

"I've been twenty years on the trail," Montana went on. "For twenty years I've been waiting for this day, for this minute. I was ten years old when I began my search for my father's lost wagon. I've trailed a hundred of them. I've killed men that stood

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in the way of my search.—Let me tell you something else. It was I who helped to kill Bill Sladen, when I saw him hit Lyndia Kolsar with his fist. You've been wanting to know who killed Bill. It was my bullet that went into his damned head. I didn't know then that he had a hand in keeping my father a prisoner here. I shot him because I didn't like his looks."

He paused, stood silent for a time, looking at Sladen. Then his body fell into a curious crouch, he stiffened.

"Now!" he said.

There was a wild look in Blackie's eyes. His gun was in his hand. He threw it up.

Too late! Montana's revolver crashed spitefully from his hip. Blackie had not even found time to press the trigger of his weapon when Montana's bullet hit him. He fell backward, his knees doubling under him. Upon his shirt front, on the left side, appeared a dark stain.

Montana stood looking down at Blackie, and Jim Rignall heard his son say in a low but distinct voice:

"I'm sorry that one bullet killed you! If you had a dozen lives, I'd have wanted to take them all!"

MONTANA ED turned his gaze from Blackie Sladen to his father. He smiled into the worshiping eyes that met his.

"I reckon that ends it, father," he said. "The Sladens will never bother you again."

Rignall studied Montana's face for a long time.

"You're a fine looking man, Ed," he said finally. "I heard you tell Blackie that you had killed men before.—It wasn't murder, was it, son?"

"No. I've never pulled a gun on a square man, father."

To their ears came a distant rumbling.

"Horses," he said. "The Sladen outfit, maybe." He entered the adobe house, pushing his father in before him, and both stood in the doorway, watching and listening.

The rumbling grew louder, it developed into a thunderous roar, and Montana saw a drove of riderless horses sweeping down the east slope toward the ranch buildings. Behind the horses came a group of cowboys, yelling and snapping their quirts.

"It's the Carson outfit," ejaculated Montana. "They've recovered the Flying U horse herd. Carson himself is with them."

He stepped out, now. A dust cloud whirled over the ranch buildings, the horse herd halted near the corral and began to mill near the gate. Sweeping down the level in front of the ranch house, the Carson outfit brought their horses to a halt in a smother of dust. Carson recognized Montana and spurred his horse close to the adobe house.

"We got them," he shouted triumphantly. "The horses, I mean. Some of the thieves got away, but they had to burn leather to do it." He paused, staring, for he now saw Jim Rignall standing in the doorway.

"Who's this, here?"

"My father."

Carson was out of the saddle in a flash and shaking Jim Rignall's hand. They stood there for an instant, and then a sharp cry from one of the J Bar C riders caught their attention.

They turned swiftly, to see another group of riders racing toward them, down the long eastern slope. There was a sudden scurrying among the riders of the J Bar C outfit, and then a shout of recognition from one of them.

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"It's the Flying U outfit!" this man yelled.

THE Underhill riders came on at top speed, but their horses were foam-flecked and tired.

Grimly they dismounted and approached the adobe house, to stand there for a time, gazing down at Blackie Sladen while they listened to Montana's story, which was corroborated by Jim Rignall and Carson.

These Flying U men had been prepared to punish Montana for his part in the grim tragedies that had been enacted since his coming, but now they relented, after hearing the gun fighter's story.

"All right," said a tall Flying U man. "That settles Blackie.—But where's Steele and the girls?"

"I reckon they're in that rimmed cache in the timber, the place Jake Kolsar was telling Thor about," said another. Suddenly he paused and stared round-eyed at Montana, remembering the scene back in the Kolsar cabin when Mrs. Kolsar had divulged to Thor the fact that Lyndia had been found as a baby near the burned prospector's wagon, years earlier, and had been brought up by her as though she were the Kolsars' own child.

"Hell!" the man shouted. "If the prisoner in the 'dobe house is the man who owned the burned wagon, then you're his son!—Why—why damn it, that makes you Lyndia's brother! Mrs. Kolsar was telling us that Lyndia was the baby that was lost from the wagon."

Montana's face blanched. Jim Rignall was trembling with excitement; he suddenly sank to the bench in front of the adobe house and covered his face with his hands. Montana leaned over him, patting his head. Then he straightened, looked at the Flying U man who had spoken.

"Do you know how to find that cache?" he said.

"Sure!"

Again Montana spoke to his father, telling him to remain where he was, then he leaped into the saddle and sent his horse plunging up the slope, following the Flying U and the Carson outfits.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE GLADIATORS.

FAR back at the edge of the timber, Thor had found the head of the dry wash mentioned by Jake Kolsar. And as the big black horse, running with mighty leaps, breasted the slight rise that led into the wash he was like a black thunderbolt, hurled against the green of the foliage.

Day and night Thor had ridden since the kidnapping and the horse rustling had taken place. He was tired, physically and mentally. Yet he drove his horse on.

When he came at last within sight of the rim rock cache, he drew Midnight down, suspecting that perhaps some members of the Hat outfit would be with the Sladens and that they would be watching for their enemies. Swiftly he approached the cache from above. Having slid off Midnight, he trailed the reins over the animal's head, drew his gun and stole through the brush. Caution was not in him at this moment, however, and so he broke through the brush, suddenly to find himself looking directly at Nance and Lyndia, who were lying in the shelter of the rock rim, bound hand and foot.

The girls saw Thor; they had heard him coming. Lyndia, as she revealed

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afterward, believed that she had heard Midnight coming while he was still half a mile away, and she had whispered her conviction to Nance.

It was Lyndia who spoke first to Thor. "Look out!" she warned in a whisper. "Steele is here. He is armed. He has gone into the timber to look after the horses. I hear him coming back now!"

Thor stepped back into the cover of the underbrush and waited, gun in hand.

Presently there was a crashing of twigs and the rasping of dry brush as Steele Sladen forced his way through the wall of brush that surrounded the cache and stepped into view. He also had apparently heard Thor's horse, for he paused at the edge of the brush and peered around as if seeking some explanation. Reassured by the silence, he strode toward the girls and stood over them, grinning.

Just for an instant, Steele turned his back toward the spot where Thor stood, and in that instant Thor stepped out, gun in hand. Steele must have heard him, or perhaps had felt his presence. His muscles jerked and he seemed about to turn.

Thor's voice, vibrant with passion, halted that movement. "All right, Steele," he ordered. "Don't move. Who is with you?"

"We are alone," said Lyndia. "Blackie was here, too, but he went to the Hat, early this morning."

The girl's face was pale as she looked at Thor, but there was a smile of confidence and trust on her lips. Thor was so quiet and so calm that he frightened her, and the smile which he gave her was so mirthless and cold that it sent a chill over her. He was crouching a little as he stood behind Steele, and the watching girls knew that if Steele moved a muscle Thor would kill him. Evidently Steele knew also, for he stood rigid, silent, his face white.

"You are all right, Lyndia?" asked Thor.

"Yes."

"Has Steele Sladen harmed either of you?"

"No. Nothing has happened. Nobody has harmed us. They just tied us up, and were rough with us."

"Unbuckle your gun belt, Steele!" ordered Thor. He stood watching as the belt was loosened.

"Now throw it away from you," said Thor.

The gun belt, bearing cartridges and six-shooter, landed in the sand several feet distant.

"Now take ten steps straight ahead, and stand there."

Steele obeyed.

Hatred, implacable and intense, seethed in Thor. Throughout the years, the mutual dislike of the two men had been growing, making a clash between them inevitable. Perhaps, had Steele Sladen avoided the aggressions that Montana had witnessed since he had arrived in the section, the men might have finished their lives without coming into violent physical contact. However, Steele's hatred had been too intense, and at last the peculiar series of circumstances in which the men found themselves enmeshed had led to this moment.

Thor, like Steele, unbuckled his cartridge belt and threw it from him. Then, ignoring Sladen, he took out a knife and cut the girls' bonds.

STEELE SLADEN had heard the thud of Thor's gun belt and gun as they landed in the sand, and he knew what Thor's action portended.

A physical clash with Underhill was

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more to Steele Sladen's liking than a shooting. In every way, during the years of his acquaintance with Underhill, his manner had proclaimed his belief in his superiority. His boasts, his swaggering, his insulting and insolent references to Underhill, had revealed his feelings clearly. Many times, in his boastful moods, he had declared that he would welcome an opportunity to meet Underhill as man to man, without weapons other than those with which nature had provided them.

Now, when Steele Sladen's acts had made him an outlaw, it seemed that the opportunity for that conflict had come.

Slowly he turned. He stood like a beast at bay, staring into Thor's eyes. His huge body, with its great, wide shoulders; his shaggy head, lowered and thrust forward; made him seem like a buffalo meditating a charge. His eyes were glittering with the wild light of desperation as he moved slowly forward, his huge arms hanging rigidly at his sides, his hands clenched.

"Damn you!" he rumbled hoarsely. "I'll tear you apart!"

With amazing swiftness he leaped, coming in like a wrestler, as if meditating the instant annihilation of his enemy.

Thor was cool, alert. Judging the distance between them perfectly, he stepped to the left as Steele came in, and his right fist landed with a terrific crash under Steele's chin. Steele fell on his face. His shaggy head rolled from side to side, his great shoulders quivered. He rolled over and sat up, swaying, his glazed eyes seeking his enemy.

When his vision had cleared he was up again, propelling himself like a huge projectile. This time, Thor's blow missed, and there was a dull thud as the bodies of the two men came together. Locked in violent embrace, staggering from the terrific crash, the two men went down together, threshing furiously in a cloud of dust that instantly arose and enveloped them.

NANCE KAYNE screamed and covered her eyes with her hands as if to make certain that she would not look at what was happening. Lyndia, pale and rigid, her eyes glowing with excitement, made no sound of any kind.

Down into a depression at the foot of the slope, near some trees, the men rolled. Now they got to their feet, locked, straining, their hatred so violent that they took no thought of science or skill, but sought only to rend and maim each other by sheer strength.

The watching girls saw Thor suddenly step back and come in again. They heard his fist crash against Steele's head, saw Steele's head snap back, saw his knees bend under him.

He got up again and drove forward, swinging his arms like flails. A wild blow caught Thor upon the side of the head, and he toppled and went down near the base of a tree. Before he could get up Steele was rushing toward him, to kick at his face.

Lyndia ran forward, her eyes flaming with rage. Nance screamed again. But Steele's foot did not land, for Thor had rolled over, got to his feet and met Steele's instant rush with a terrific blow that landed in the pit of the man's stomach. They came close together now, striking savage blows that were heard above the sounds made by their threshing feet. Locked together, they fought among the trees.

But the first edge had worn off their fury. They now moved more slowly. Their strength had not ebbed, but the

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frenzy had worn off and they were now more deliberate—and with deliberation came accuracy. Blows were landing oftener and there was not so much clinching.

Like the great beast that he resembled, Steele Sladen would back away, lower his great head and rush in swinging both huge arms. Thor, not quite so massive as his adversary, but equally as strong, and more active, met the charges by shifting. Balancing his weight carefully, he thudded fearful blows into Steele's face.

Their fury had made them insensate. They felt no shock, no pain. They were not aware of the blood that streamed down their faces. They thought of nothing but to rend and maim, and to slay if possible.

The girls pressed closer, fascinated, cold with apprehension. With tense, pale faces, they watched, aware that the two men, more powerful than any others in the country, were fighting an epic battle—a battle that would not cease until one or the other was convincingly and conclusively beaten.

THE two men had been fighting fully a quarter of an hour, and the scene of the combat had gradually shifted until they were out of the timber and upon a little level above another slope, a sharp one, that led down to the sandy bed of a creek.

Nance had twice called to them to stop the fight, but they had ignored her pleas. Lyndia made no demonstration whatever. She was pallid, and her great dark eyes seemed to flame with passion as she watched. Her hands were clenched. She was obviously unconscious of her surroundings.

Until now it had been Steele who had forced the fighting. His attacks had been swift and violent, and he had put all his strength into each effort he had made, undoubtedly hoping for a quick victory. But he had been met with a vigor and fury that had equalled his own. It had seemed to the girls that Thor, usually more lithe and active, had been conserving his strength. They had observed the dark circles around his eyes and had wondered if the man was physically tired. But now they decided that he was not. Thor was fighting with his brain as well as with his muscles, watching for the time when his enemy should spend his strength. That Thor could coolly plan the battle in that manner pleased the girls. His forbearance was a tribute to his self-control.

Steele's feet seemed to lag; his weight retarded his movements. He sought to fend his enemy off by weakly pushing his clenched fists in the general direction of Thor's face. Steele had spent his strength; he was not recuperating as quickly as at first.

Desperately, he gripped Thor about the waist, and Thor, twisting and squirming, twined his legs about Steele's. This movement sent both men off balance and they crashed to the ground, rolling over and over in a furious struggle for advantage.

Steele Sladen's growing loss of strength was again apparent. When the struggle ended, Thor was on top. For an instant he sat astride his enemy, gazing down into the latter's eyes. Thor smiled contemptuously. The smile brought a glare of fury into Steele's eyes.

HE heaved mightily and threw Thor off. They got to their feet again, and for an instant stood facing each other.

Steele was now breathing with his mouth open. It was obvious that he

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was near exhaustion. Into his eyes had come a wild, desperately anxious light. He knew that his strength was ebbing.

Thor, too, was tiring; though not as rapidly as Steele. He was breathing a little faster, but his lips were still tightly pressed together, and in his eyes was still the cold, savage and relentless fire that had been in them since the beginning of the battle. But he gave Steele no opportunity to rest. Sladen gave ground.

It seemed to Nance and Lyndia that the men's muscles could not much longer endure, that there must soon come an end to the capacity of the flesh to withstand such constant and terrific battering.

There came now into the minds of the girls a conviction that the end was imminent. The keen, watchful eyes of Lyndia were first to grasp the fact.

Thor was a terrible fighter, Lyndia decided. There was no limit to his determination. He was impervious to punishment.

In this fight Thor was but vindicating Nance Kayne's judgment of him. On the first day she had encountered him, she had thought his nature resembled granite. Once Thor decided to do a thing, as her Uncle Carson had told her, he would go ahead in spite of hell and high water. Carson's exact words. And watching him, Nance decided that her uncle had been right. The man would not be beaten.

It may have been that Steele was beginning to realize that he had underestimated his old enemy. For now, backing away a few steps, slowly as if on the point of conceding defeat; dropping his hands to his sides limply, as if no longer able to conceal his weariness; he stood still for a moment. His great, shaggy head came forward, was slowly lowered. In that position he suddenly hurled himself forward. His head struck Thor in the stomach with terrific force. Then the great head went up, with a movement strangely like that of a bull tossing his horns; and Thor, the breath temporarily knocked out of him, was hurled backward a dozen feet, landing upon his back.

THERE was a scream from Nance. An odd smile was on Lyndia's lips, a strange glint in her lustrous eyes. But when Steele plunged forward, hoping to reach Thor before the latter could get up, the girl was close beside him.

Steele was too late. He had aimed a kick at Thor's head; but he missed, and Thor rolled out of danger and got to his feet. Blindly, savagely, Steele rushed and struck. He missed, and Thor drove a terrific blow to his chin.

Steele staggered, his body slewed around. He almost went down, then he straightened. Thor, with all his force, swung his right fist, seeming to start it almost at his knees. The fist landed on Steele's jaw with a sound like an ax splitting a log. Steele went down stiffly, flat on his back. His mouth was open, his eyes closed.

And now the girls saw that Thor himself had been hurt when Steele had butted him. His face was pallid and drawn with pain, and his hands went to his groin as he bent forward and went to his knees, writhing about in agony.

Although the breath had been knocked out of him, he was not badly injured, for at last he got up and stood there, swaying. Lyndia and Nance grasped both his arms, in an attempt to steady him.

Suddenly Lyndia screamed and gazed horror stricken at an apparition

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that had suddenly appeared behind Thor.

It was Steele Sladen. Miraculously, he had recovered while the girls had been occupied with Thor, and he was now standing behind Thor, within arm's length. Both hands were above his head, gripping a huge bowlder which he was about to bring down upon Thor's head.

A momentary silence followed Lyndia's scream. It was broken by the sharp, whip-like crack of a border rifle.

For an instant, Steele stood there; then his straining muscles relaxed, the bowlder dropped, and he fell backward. Near the center of his forehead appeared a circular hole, out of which oozed blood.

Fifty feet from the spot where Steel had fallen, behind a huge rock upon which he had rested the long-barreled Sharps rifle, was Jake Kolsar, the gangling youth, who had followed Thor to the cache. Young Kolsar's face was dead white, but his eyes glared vengefully as he watched the still form of the man who had struck him the day they had met near the Kolsar ranch house, when Jake had failed to answer Steele's questions as Steele had wished them to be answered.

CHAPTER XL.

REUNITED.

THERE came now a thunderous rataplan of hoofs, a terrific crashing of wild brush, and the girls turned, startled, to see the Flying U and the J Bar C cowboys bearing down upon them through the timber, their horses on a dead run.

Turmoil followed. A cloud of dust from the sliding hoofs of horses brought to a sudden stop rose and enveloped them all. When the dust settled, the riders of both outfits had crowded around the girls and Thor, and the last of the Sladens.

And now young Jake Kolsar stalked through the group and walked slowly toward Lyndia, his Sharps rifle under his arm. He went up to her and stood gazing at her solemnly, while all the riders, Montana included, stood silent, watching him curiously. They had been told that he had fired the shot that had killed Steele Sladen. They were not strangers to death, having seen it in various forms, yet they were curious to look at this boy, who had been instrumental in accomplishing the destruction of their common enemy. There was savage satisfaction in their hearts.

But before he could speak to Lyndia, Jesse Carson shoved his way forward, gripped the girl by both her arms and turned her so that she faced Montana.

"Lyndia," he said, "I've known you a long time, and I want to be the first to tell you this news. Montana Ed is your brother. That crazy man that the Sladens were supposed to have in the 'dobe house wasn't crazy at all. It was your father. His name is Jim Rignall. You are his daughter!"

Carson released Lyndia and stepped back, smiling widely at the amazed expression on her face.

The girl looked inquiringly at Thor, as if seeking confirmation of this astonishing disclosure. Thor smiled at her and drew her close to him.

"Lyndia," he said, "I stopped at the Kolsar ranch this morning, to find out if any one had any news about you. Mrs. Kolsar talked to me. Do you remember the story about the baby that the woman in the wagon had with her?"

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Lyndia nodded. "Oh, yes, I remember it well."

"You were that baby, Lyndia," said Thor. "Mrs. Kolsar is not your mother. She told me so."

"Oh!" gasped Lyndia. She stood for an instant, gazing wildly into Thor's eyes. "Oh," she said again, "is that true?"

"It must be true," answered Thor. "Mrs. Kolsar swore it was—and even Peter Kolsar admitted it. That was why he beat you. That was why he sold you to Bill Sladen."

Lyndia continued to stare at Thor. Her dark, luminous eyes were glowing with amazement and dawning delight. It seemed that she could not yet understand.

"I—I am the baby that the woman had?"

"Yes. You were that baby."

Lyndia drew Thor's head down and kissed him.

"I am so, so glad." Her voice was low and vibrant with emotion.

She turned and looked at Montana, who was standing near, watching and listening. Montana's eyes were glowing as Lyndia looked at him; he smiled. Lyndia walked close to him. It was as if she was now seeing him for the first time. She studied him as she might have studied the face of a man she had never seen before, a man who now interested her. As she looked at him, her eyes began to glow with pleasure, delight. She smiled at him.

"Ed," she whispered. "Ed Rignall, my brother! Oh, it is too wonderful to be true."

IMPULSIVELY, hungrily, she threw her arms about the gun fighter's neck and hugged him tightly. Then she released him, seized him by the shoulders and held him, to peer at him with joyous intensity. Then her mood changed.

She grew suddenly serious, eager. Her voice was rapid, her breath arrested. "Mr. Carson spoke of the Sladens keeping father a prisoner. Father—father," she whispered. "Where is he?"

Montana told her that her father was at the Hat, awaiting her.

Nance Kayne was watching all this breathlessly. Thor, remembering the first meeting between Montana and Lyndia, was convinced that upon that occasion some obscure instinct must have worked upon the man. For to Thor it had appeared that Montana visualized the girl as some one whom he had seen before. He had seemed to struggle in an attempt to force his memory to identify her. And Lyndia, too, had acted strangely. She had blushed mysteriously under Montana's steady scrutiny.

Jake Kolsar had been standing there, silent. Now he spoke, in an oddly strained voice.

"So you ain't my sister?" said Jake, still looking at Lyndia. "I heard what you all said. You were that baby. My mother is not your mother at all. You are Montana's sister.—I'm glad, for you.—I'm glad the Sladens are gone, too. I'm glad I killed the other Sladen men, in the basin." His gaze left Lyndia's eyes and he stared downward into the sand at his feet. "You'll marry Thor Underhill, I guess," he added. "Will you forget me?"

"I shall never forget you, Jake," answered Lyndia. She embraced the boy, holding him tightly.

"You'll come and see us, sometime?" asked Jake.

"I will come. And now I shall like you better than I have ever liked you, Jake," said Lyndia.

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"All right, then," said Jake. "I'm going back to tell father and mother what has happened." He strode off, his overalls flapping, his tragic white face long and solemn. They saw him mount his horse and ride over the east trail.

Jesse Carson stood in front of Thor. "We're going your way," he said. "We'll give you a hand with the horse herd."

"The horse herd?"

"Yes. We caught up with the Hat men about ten or fifteen miles to the south," he continued. "They thought they'd got away clean, and they were taking their time. They all got away but two. We took the horses over to the Sladen place." He reached out, seized Thor's right hand and shook it. "You and Montana have done this country a lot of good," he went on. "We can get along without men like the Sladens and their bunch of plug-uglies. If the law should hear of what's happened, we'll all stand by you. But I reckon no disciples of the law are ever going to bother their heads about men like the Sladens."

At the Hat they all sought the adobe house, where Lyndia's father was waiting. There every one inspected the interior, and the chain that had shackled Jim Rignall. While inside the house, Montana was prevailed upon to repeat the story of his discovery and to relate the details of the tragic fate of the wagon and its occupants.

Later, after several of the riders emerged from the timber, where they had buried Blackie Sladen, the entire company mounted horses and rode away. The Flying U and the Carson riders rounded up the horse herd and sent them clattering on ahead, while Thor and Lyndia, with Montana and Nance, remained for a time at the adobe house. There followed a sacred period between Lyndia and her father. After a while they mounted their horses and rode across the range to the Flying U.

It may have been chance that brought Montana and Nance close together on the trail. For a time they rode side by side, an awkward silence between them. And at last, perhaps perceiving from a study of Nance's face that she had no objection to his riding beside her, Montana spoke.

"I reckon that maybe we can be neighbors now," he said. "Twice, I thought you would never look at me again. Ma'am," he added, earnestly, "I've never been a gun fighter of the type you thought I was. Won't you believe me?"

"I—I think I understand you now, Montana," answered Nance, shyly.

CHAPTER XLI.

LOVE ONLY.

IT was Montana who proposed the trip. Montana, whose nomadic instincts had been nurtured and developed by his twenty years of wandering over the face of the earth. Upon one of his pilgrimages, he had discovered a little known valley which was not more than a hundred miles from the Wishbone. In this valley there were no inhabitants. There was virgin land, isolated among the mountains, hemmed in by ranges that protected it from the wild, high winds.

There was, Montana argued, no need of delay. So long as they were to have a double marriage, there was no excuse for it. Romance was in the atmosphere. August was about to end, and golden, radiant September was stealing upon them. The valley was beautiful in September. Allowing a

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week to ride there, a two-weeks' sojourn, and another week to make the return trip, they should be back at the Flying U toward the end of the month.

That was how, on a day late in August, the big living room in the Flying U ranch house became the scene of a double wedding ceremony in which the bishop of Arizona officiated, while Thor's mother and father, and Jesse Carson and his wife, together with Jim Rignall and the Flying U and Carson riders, comprised the interested witnesses.

In the early morning—though not early enough to escape the well-wishers who stayed behind—the two couples rode away from the Flying U ranch house, trailed by four pack horses. They went southwestward, into the desert, pressing against its steady breath until they reached its southern rim, when they found themselves among the foothills of a mountain range where there were green valleys and alluring vistas.

They were in no hurry, so they went leisurely onward to Montana's paradise, camping at night in the secluded places, talking, laughing, experiencing the romance of a honeymoon in the open.

THE END.

A South Seas Solomon

THE above title has been applied to the native king of Malekula, one of the New Hebrides islands. At the last count he had one hundred and four wives, all living in regal state. Wives are this king's hobby; he collects them as some men do stamps. He employs agents who visit the other islands of the group and there purchase the tallest and most handsome women for their royal employer. Known as the Big Nambas, the Malekula natives are a tribe of giants. Few are under six feet.

Dwelling in the upper fastnesses of the great mountains running through the island's center, the Nambas are a sullen, treacherous tribe, bitterly resenting the intrusion of any white man. Their dynasty is believed to be the world's oldest. Their much-married sovereign is an absolute autocrat. To date only two white men have seen him.

The Nambas are addicted to bizarre customs. When a man marries he knocks out two of the bride's front teeth. This vacancy in her upper molars is her wedding symbol and proclaims to all and sundry that she is a married woman. Acquiring a new spouse frequently, it has been authoritatively stated that the king employs an official "tooth knocker."

Pigs are to the Nambas what money is to the white man. A man's social status is rated according to the number of pigs he owns. If he increases his herd to a certain number he is ranked among the aristocracy of Namba society. When a man marries he must pay a dowry of so many porkers to the bride's father. The larger her father's pig herd, the higher is his daughter's social position, and the prospective groom must contribute porkers in accordance. Consequently the chief ambition of the Namba swain aspiring to marry into élite society is to acquire—by fair or foul means—as many porkers as possible.

William P. Schramm.

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DO YOU READ DETECTIVE FICTION?

"It's a girl," the man called. "She's unconscious"

The Man Without a Face

By Fred MacIsaac

What Was the Mystery of the Nameless Thing Lying Dead in the Deserted House—Murdered in the Night?

NERVOUSLY, Constable Bide Parker and his deputy, Dave Higgins, crept on tiptoe through the big house. They had no desire to bump into a sinister mystery, but a phone call had said a man was dead, and they were officers of the law.

Through five untenanted bedrooms they searched, growing steadily more nervous. Then Bide pushed the sixth door open, stood stock still and grasped at Dave. Directly opposite the door was a wide bed. On either side of the bed was a huge floor candlestick in which a tall candle was burning.

In the bed, wearing black satin pyjamas, lay a man whose hands were folded across his breast. The red satin spread was turned back to his waist. But what caused the two timid officers of the law to take to their heels was the man's face. Or rather, the lack of it.

He had no face. Where his countenance should have been was a bloody pulp.

Begin this, the greatest of Fred MacIsaac's mystery serials, in next week's DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, on sale July 26.

Read DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY—10c

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SOLOMON grows up:

Westerville, Ohio.

I see in your issue of May 21 that one of your readers does not think *John Solomon* is any good any more. Well, that just shows he is off his base. I have read *Solomon* stories since about 1913. After reading "Solomon Settles Accounts" I dug up one of the first ones and read it over again, and let me tell you, this last one was better—a lot better. You can't please everybody all the time, sure, but you'll please a whole lot of readers if you get more *Solomon*. The same goes for *Peter the Brazen*. Plenty of them.

I. D. BIERMAN.

LIKES cast of characters:

Denver, Colo.

I think that ARGOSY is the best magazine of its type on the news-stands. "Ninth Inning Nerve" is the best story in the latest issues of ARGOSY. I could hardly wait to finish it. I dislike futuristic stories, but as long as ARGOSY is sold I will buy it.

"Argonotes" contains much constructive and also some destructive criticism. If a person doesn't like a story he does not have to read it. The cast of characters at the beginning of each part of the story, "Timber War," is a very good idea, and I think you should put the cast at the head of each part of the serials.

GORDON GREEN.

AN interesting beginning:

Akron, Ohio.

About thirty years ago, when I was pretty young, my father had a bad case of smallpox. Medical science at that time had learned just enough about disease germs to be terribly afraid of them, and our family was put under an almost inhumanly severe quarantine. For six weeks none of us could leave the premises, and no one but the doctor and nurse could enter. We were instructed that all books and magazines used during this period would have to be burned. So father's library was closed up—and that left a rather bookish, fourteen-year-old boy with nothing to do and nothing to read.

Some of my friends took pity on me, however, and brought papers and magazines, from time to time, and left them in the box, out at the corner of the yard, along with the groceries, the mail, the medicines, etc. Among these was a great stack of ARGOSYS—with the old yellow cover, depicting a ship under full sail.

Ever since that time I have been an ARGOSY fan. It was in the ARGOSY that I became acquainted with Edgar Rice Burroughs and his friend *John Carter*, whom I followed through breathless adventures in his many years of Martian experience.

My work and my more serious interests require me to read and digest much that is pretty heavy and that demands intense concentration. So I find it desirable to keep on hand something with which to relax. Instead of detective stor. I read fantastic tales that are to be found in ARGOSY.

REV. B. Z. STAMBAUGH.

GOOD Westerns? We try:

Chicago, Ill.

I favor the serial story over the short. Likewise, I prefer the novelette (the longer, the better) to either the serial or the short. The feature, "Men of Daring," is especially interesting, though short, and I hope you can keep the series going for a long time. When you can get *good* Westerns, let's have them. I have never had any complaint to make with the types of stories selected by you; occasional ones don't go over with me, but I'm not the only reader by a long shot; so why complain. When better stories are written I know I'll find them in ARGOSY.

JOYCE N. RIGGS.

DOESN'T like fantastics:

Urbana, Ill.

I have read ARGOSY for more than thirteen years. It's the best thing anyway near its class, and I don't see how I could do without my usual copy. I read everything from cover to cover, except fantastic and impossible stories. Why not have a readers' vote on this kind of story? I believe they would be voted out.

"Power," "Timber War," "Ninth Inning Nerve" are the best going. I sure wish you'd

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let W. Wirt write for some one else, until he learns to write something besides slaughter tales.

All in all, ARGOSY is a mighty good pal, and I hope it lasts for at least fifty years yet. The writers are, for the most part, above par, and the ones I like best are MacIsaac, Hopper, Grinstead, Pierce and Worts. Keep coming, ARGOSY.

CHARLES E. GRIFFIT.

LIKES Lowell Thomas and "Men of Daring":

Washington C. H., Ohio.

I like the changes made in the ARGOSY. The two new features you have added are fine. Lowell Thomas is a very interesting feature writer. His stories add much to the adventure of the ARGOSY. "Men of Daring" certainly deserves a permanent place in the ARGOSY. These "Men of Daring" are all unsung heroes and the world in general perhaps rarely hears of their deeds, so I am glad that the ARGOSY is giving them some of the honor that they all greatly deserve.

I have read with interest the comments on a cast of characters at the beginning of stories. In my own opinion I don't consider a cast of characters necessary or even desirable. Surely it isn't needed for a short story or even a novelette, while serials have their synopsis and anyway it is only a week between copies.

IVAN M. BOYER.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

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3.....

4.....

5.....

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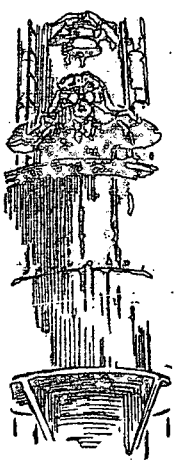
City.....*State*.....

Fill out coupons from 10 consecutive issues and get a large ARGOSY drawing. This coupon not good after Oct. 15, 1932.

7-23



Looking Ahead!

NO BACK TRAIL

Riding out of the past dashes a fast shooting, grim eyed young avenger of the West. A novel by

R. DE S. HORN

TWO NOVELETTES

TOWERS OF MYSTERY

Fighting racketeers and death atop New York skyscrapers

By WILL McMORROW

DEMERARA DIAMONDS

Jewel smugglers and intrigue in British Guiana jungles

By TOM CURRY

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—JULY 30th

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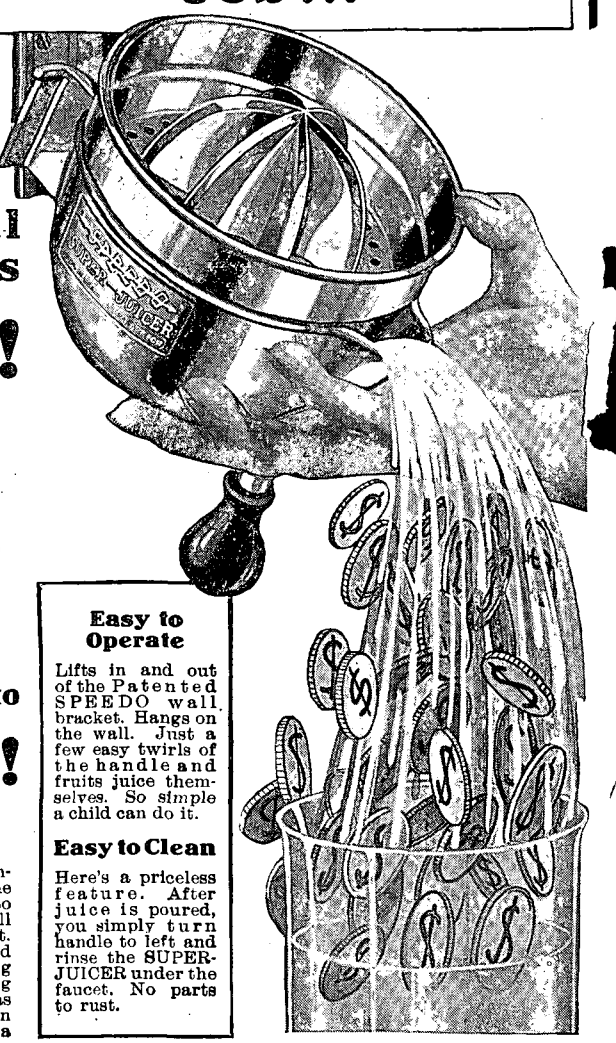
Revolutionary NEW

SUPER-JUICER

Banishes Another Hateful Kitchen Job!..

It's Different
Hangs on the Wall!



Oranges, Lemons, Small Grapefruit Juice Themselves

LIKE MAGIC!

At last a new kind of automatic Super-Juicer makes the dream of every housewife come true! Different. Hangs on the wall. Just a turn of the handle and fruits juice themselves instantly. No waste, work, worry or bother. Easy to clean—cannot rust. Priced amazingly low. Agents pocketing the money of their lives. Rush coupon below for UNIQUE LIBERAL FREE TEST OFFER at once!

AGENTS!

Just Turn the Crank and Make Up to

$17.00 IN A DAY!

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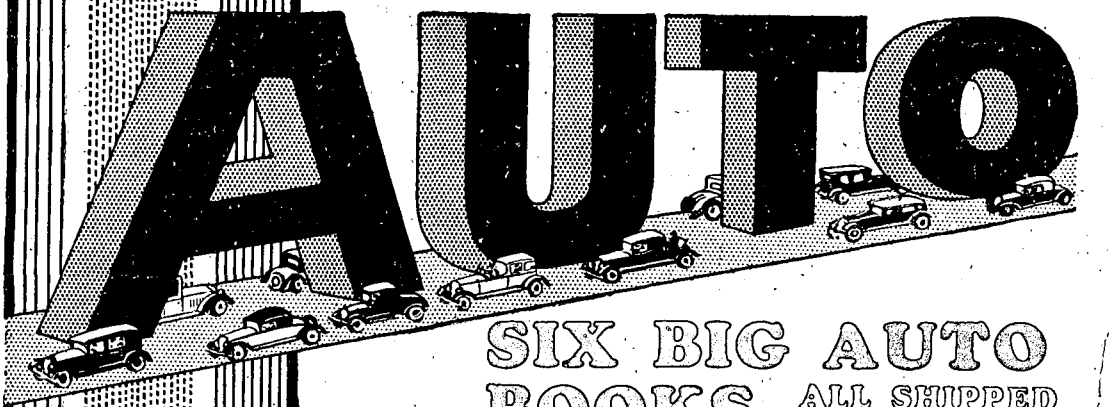

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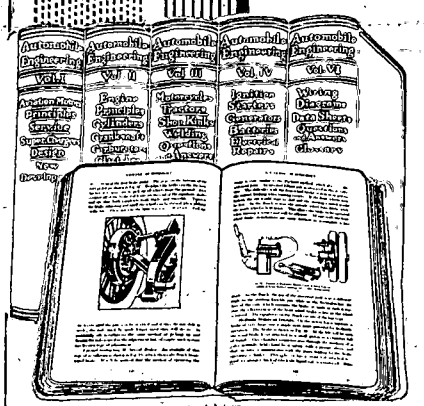
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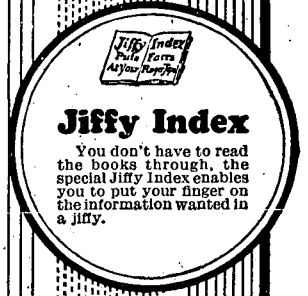

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